

ALIENS

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BY

WILLIAM McFEE

AUTHOR OF "CASUALS OF THE SEA"



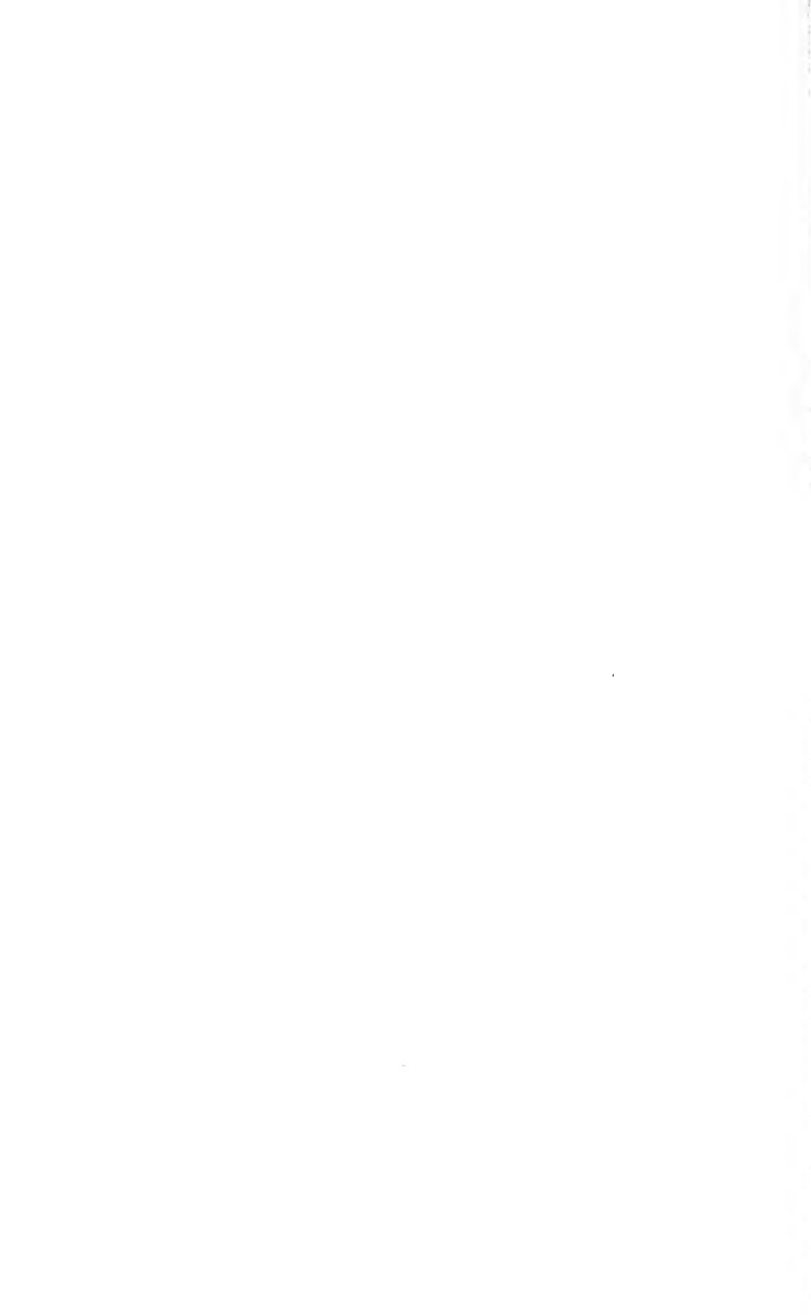
TORONTO
THE MUSSON BOOK CO.
LIMITED

PRINTED IN GARDEN CITY, N. Y., U. S. A.

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TO
MARGERY ALLINGHAM



PREFACE

[*Publisher's Note: It should be explained that an earlier version of "Aliens" was published in London in 1914, and some copies were also distributed in the United States. After the issue of "Casuals of the Sea" the present publishers purchased the rights to "Aliens" and urged Mr. McFee to re-write the story. His account of the history of this book is here inserted, and will undoubtedly take its place among the most entertaining and interesting prefaces in modern literature.*]

SO many people are unaware of the number of works of fiction which have been rewritten after publication. I was rather surprised myself when I came to recapitulate them. I wouldn't go so far as to say that second editions, like second thoughts, are the best, because I at once think of "The Light that Failed." But I do believe that under the very unusual circumstances of the genesis and first issue of *Aliens* I am justified in offering a maturer and more balanced representation of what that book stands for.

The notion of a character like Mr. Carville came to me while I was busy finishing "Casuals of the Sea" during the late fall of 1912. A short story was the result. It went to many likely and unlikely publishers, for I knew very little of the field. I don't know whether the "Farm Journal" (of which I am a devoted reader) got it, but it is quite prob-

able. A mad artist who lived near us, in an empty store along with a studio stove and three priceless Kakemonos, told me he would "put me next" an editor of his acquaintance. I forget the name of the paper now, but I think it had some connection with women's clothes. I sent in my story, but unfortunately my friend forgot to put me next, for I got neither cash nor manuscript. The next time I passed the empty store, I stepped in to explain, but the artist had a black eye, and his own interest was so engrossed in Chinese lacquer-work and a stormy divorce case he had coming on shortly, that I was struck dumb. What was a short story in comparison with such issues? And I knew he had no more opinion of me as an author than I had of him as an artist.

But when another typed copy came back from a round of visits to American magazines, I kept it. I had a strong conviction that, in making a book of what was then only a rather vague short story, I was not such a fool as the mad artist seemed to think. I reckoned his judgment had been warped by the highly eccentric environment in which he delighted. The empty store in which he lived, like a rat in a shipping-case, was new and blatant. It thrust its blind, lime-washed window-front out over the sidewalk. Over the lime-wash one could see the new pine shelving along the walls loaded with innumerable rolls of wall-paper. Who was responsible for this moribund stock I could never discover. Perhaps the mad artist imagined them to be priceless Kakemonos of such transcendent and blinding

beauty that he did not dare unroll them. They resembled a library of papyrus manuscripts. Here and there among them stood some exquisitely hideous dragon or bird of misfortune. He had a bench in the store too, I remember, and seemed to have some sort of business in mending such things for dealers. And he did a little dealing himself too, for his madness had not destroyed his appreciation of the value of money. He would exhibit some piece of Oriental rubbish, and when one had politely admired it, he would say pleasantly, "Take it!" One took it, and a week later he would borrow its full value as a loan.

With his Kakemonos he was even more mystifying, for he would develop sudden and quite unnecessary bursts of rage, and announce his refusal of anything under a million for them. And then he would exhibit them, taking them from a broken Libby, McNeill and Libby milk case under his camp-bed, and holding the rolled splendours aloft. And then, with a grandiose gesture, as of some insane nobleman showing his interminable pedigree, he would let the thing unfold and one beheld a sad animal of unknown species sitting in a silver winter landscape, or a purple silk sunset. And over it glared the mad artist, a sallow fraud, yet watching with some impatience how the stranger regarded this secret preoccupation of his life. I knew nothing about such things and knew he scorned me for my ignorance. Like most artists, he was an unconscious liar. He strove also to give an impression of tremendous power. He had gestures which were supposed to register virility, irresistible force, abysmal

contempt. And if the word had not been worked to death by people who don't know its meaning, I would have added that he was a votary of the *kultur* of his race. His ideal, I suppose, was more the Renaissance *virtú* than our milk-and-water virtue. He made me feel that I was a worm. In short, he was a very interesting, provocative and exasperating humbug, and his very existence seemed to me sufficient reason for turning *Aliens* into a book which would shed a flickering light upon the fascinating problem of human folly.

For that is what it amounted to. I was obsessed with the problem of human folly, and he focussed that obsession. It often happens that the character which inspires a book never appears in it. In all sincere work I think it must be so. And, with the mad artist in my mind all the time, I got a good deal of fun out of writing the book, and that, after all, is the main reason one has for writing books. I finished the thing and immediately became despondent, a condition from which I was raised by an unexpected admirer. This was the elderly gentleman who did my typewriting. He dwelt half way up a tall elevator shaft in Newark, N. J., and, as far as I could gather, had farmed himself out to a number of lawyers, none of whom had much to do except telephone to each other and smoke domestic cigars. They say no man is a hero to his valet. I have never had a valet except on ship-board, and I have no desire to compete with the heroes of the average steward; but I have had a typist, and I suppose it is equally rare for an author to be inter-

esting to his amanuensis. And when I climbed one day (the elevator being out of order) to the eyrie where my elderly henchman had his nest, his bald head was shining in the westering sun, and he beamed like a jolly old sun himself as he apologised for not having finished. "He had got so interested in the parties," he explained, "that he hadn't got on as quick as he'd hoped to." I still like to think he was sincere when he said this. Anyhow, I was encouraged. I bound up my copies of typescript and shoved them out into the world. They came back. They became familiar at the local post-office. The mad artist, meeting me with a parcel, would divine the contents and inquire, "Well, and how's *Aliens*?" He would also inform me that there were several books called by that title. He would regard me with a glassy-eyed grin as I hurried on. He had no more faith in me than he had in himself. Sometimes he would pretend not to see me, but go stalking down the avenue, his fists twisted in his pockets, his head bent, his brows portentous with thought . . . a grotesque humbug!

But the time came when, as I have explained elsewhere, I had had enough of artists and books. Of art I never grow weary, but she calls me over the world. I suspect the sedentary art-worker. Most of all, I suspect the sedentary writer. I divide authors into two classes—genuine artists, and educated men who wish to earn enough to let them live like country gentlemen. With the latter I have no concern. But the artist knows when his time has come. In the same way I turned with irresistible

longing to the sea, whereon I had been wont to earn my living. It is a good life and I love it. I love the men and their ships. I find in them a never-ending panorama which illustrates my theme, the problem of human folly! Suffice it, I sent my manuscripts to London, looked out my sea dunnage, and the publishing offices of New York City knew me no more.

About a year later I received the proofs of *Aliens* while in Cristobal, Canal Zone. Without exaggeration, I scarcely knew what to do with them. The outward trappings of literature had fallen away from me with the heavy northern clothing which I had discarded on coming south. I was first assistant engineer on a mail-boat serving New Orleans, the West Indies and the Canal Zone. I had become inured once more to an enchanting existence which alternated between bunk and engine-room. I regarded the neatly-bound proof-copy of *Aliens* with misgiving. My esteemed Chief, a Scotsman in whose family learning is an honorable tradition, suggested an empty passenger cabin as a suitable study. I forget exactly how the proof-reading was dove-tailed into the watch below, but dove-tailed it was, and when the job was done, the book once more sailed across the Atlantic.

But I was not satisfied. Through the dense jungle of preoccupying affairs in which I was buried I could see that I was not satisfied. I was trying to eat my cake and have it. I make no complaint. If there be one person for whom I cherish a profound dislike it is the literary character who whines because his circumstances hinder his writing. I was

no George Gissing, cursed with a dreary distaste of common toil and mechanical things. I love both the Grecian Isles and gas-burners. But for the moment I had chosen gas-burners, or rather steam engines, and I knew I could not have both. So *Aliens* went back to London, and I went my daily round of the Caribbean. I felt that for once I could trust the judgment of a first-class publisher.

The publishers of this new edition will understand me when I say that an author has no business to trust blindly to the judgment of any house, however first-class. He has no business to do so because that outside estimate of his work must of necessity be based on scanty data. The publisher, for all his enthusiasm, takes a chance, sometimes a pretty long one. An author, as I conceive it, must be his own most uneasy, captious, cantankerous critic. He dare not delegate this job to anyone else, for that way lies the pot-boiler and the formal romance, the "made" book. I was busy, and let go the reins. And I place on record here my gratitude to those who knew enough and cared enough to recall me to my post, that I might deal with the book afresh and do justice to the reader.

Much happened between the day when I mailed my proofs from the big Post Office on Canal Street in New Orleans, and the day when I set out to write this present version. I was now in another hemisphere and the world was at war. By a happy chance I laid hold of a copy of *Aliens*, sent previously to a naval relative serving on the same station. Up and down the Ægean Sea, past fields of mines and

fields of asphodel, past many an isle familiar in happier days to me, I took my book and my new convictions about human folly. It was a slow business, for it so chanced that my own contribution to the war involved long hours. But *Aliens* grew.

And one evening, I remember, I left off in the middle of Mr. Carville's courtship and went to bed. We were speeding southward. It was a dark, moonless night. The islands of the Grecian Archipelago were roofed over with a vault of low-lying clouds, as if those ferriferous hummocks and limestone peaks were the invisible pillars of an enormous crypt. And since across the floor of this crypt many other vessels were speeding without lights, it was not wonderful that for once our good fortune failed us. For we had had good fortune. Aeroplanes had bombed, and missed us by yards. Zeppelins had come down in flaming ruin before our astonished eyes. Islands had loomed under the very fore-foot of our ship in a fog, and we had gone astern in time. But this time it was our turn. We were, in the succinct phraseology of the sea, in collision.

The story of that night will no doubt be told in its proper place and time. Suffice it that for some weeks we were laid aside, and local Levantine talent invoked to make good the disaster. And in spite of the clangour of rivetters, the unceasing cries of fezzed and turbaned mechanics, and the heavy blows of sweating carpenters, caulkers and blacksmiths, *Aliens* grew. There was a blessed interval, between five o'clock, when my day's work ended, and the late cabin-dinner at six-thirty, when the setting sun

shone into my room and illumined my study-table—a board laid across an open drawer. And *Aliens* grew. For some time, while the smashed bulwarks and distorted frames of the upper-works were being hacked away outside my window, the uproar was unendurable, and I would go ashore, note-book in pocket, to find a refuge where I could write. I would walk through the city and sit in her gardens; and the story grew. I found obscure *cafés* where I could sit with coffee and *narghileh*, and watch the Arabic letter-writers worming the thoughts from their inarticulate clients, and *Aliens* grew. And later, near the Greek Patriarchate, I found that which to me is home—a second-hand book-store. For I mark my passage about this very wonderful world by old book-stores. London, Glasgow, Liverpool, Rotterdam, Genoa, Venice, New York, Ancona, Rouen, Tunis, Savannah, Kobé and New Orleans have in my memory their old book-stores, where I could browse in peace. And here in Alexandria I found one that might have been lifted out of Royal Street or Lafayette Square. A ramshackle wooden building, bleached and blistered by many a dust-storm and torrid sun, its cracked and distorted window-panes were curtained with decayed illustrated papers in many tongues, discoloured Greek and Italian penny-dreadfuls, and a few shelves of cheap curios. Over the door a long shingle displayed on one side the legend *Librairie Universelle*, while the other bore the word ΒΙΒΛΙΟΠΩΛΙΟΝ, which you may translate as it please your fancy. Inside the narrow doors were craters and trenches and redoubts and dug-

outs of books. They lay everywhere, underfoot and overhead. They ran up at the back in a steep *glacis* with embrasures for curios, and were reflected to infinity in tall dusty pier-glasses propped against the walls. High up under the mansard roof hung an antique oriental candelabrum with one candle. Hanging from twine were stuffed fish of grotesque globular proportions, and with staring apoplectic eyes. A stuffed monkey was letting himself down, one-hand, from a thin chain, and regarded the customer with a contemptuous sneer, the dust lying thick on his head and arms and his exquisitely curled tail. And out of an apparently bomb-proof shelter below several tons of books there emerged a little old gentleman in a brilliant *tarbush*, who looked inquiringly in my direction. For a moment I paused, fascinated by the notion that I had discovered the great Library of Alexandria, reported burnt so many centuries ago. For once within those musty, warped, unpainted walls one forgot the modern world. I looked out. Across the street, backed by the immense and level blaze of an Egyptian sunset, blocks of Carrara marble blushed to pink with mauve shadows, and turned the common stone mason's yard into a garden of gigantic jewels. The hum of a great city, the grind of the trolley-cars, the cries of the itinerant sellers of nuts and fruit, of chewing gum and lottery-tickets, of shoe laces and suspenders, of newspapers, and prawns, and oysters, and eggs, and bread, the rattle of carriages and all the flashing brilliance of the palaces of pleasure, were shut out from that quiet street near the Greek Patriarchate.

I had the sudden notion of asking for permission to sit in that Universal Library, and write. And Mr. Bizikas, the little old gentleman in the vivid *tarbush*, who was lighting a very dirty tin lamp to assist the one candle in the oriental candelabrum, had no objection. I have a feeling occasionally that here I topped the rise of human felicity, as I conceive it. Perhaps I did. Anyhow, *Aliens* grew.

I must be brief. It came to pass, after certain days, that *Aliens* grew to accomplishment, and I made my way into the city through one of the many gates of the harbour. I sought the office of the Censor in a large building with a courtyard. It was a large room on the top floor, with a long table occupied by busy orderlies opening and stamping letters with astonishing rapidity. At the back, flanking an open balcony over whose balustrade I could see the blue Mediterranean and a flawless sapphire sky, were two roll-top desks concealing two officers whose polished bald heads shone above stacks of papers. At the deferential insistence of an orderly, one of the heads rose, and a large, ruddy Yorkshire face examined the intruder. In some diffidence I explained the delicate nature of my mission. I opened my parcel and displayed, with the pride of a parent, how *Aliens* had grown. The officer rose to his feet, a tall, strong, north-country figure, and looked keenly at me over his glasses. Was I a British subject? What was the nature of the manuscript? What was the name of my transport? What was my rank? And so on. To all of which I gave courteous and, I hope, truthful an-

swers. "Well, there's a great deal of it, you know," he remarked. I bowed. I knew, having written it. "Well, call in a week's time." I retired, silently blessing the British Army Officer for his blunt courtesy, his admirable brevity and matchless common sense.

And I called in a week's time. It appeared that the Captain had gone through *Aliens* and was satisfied that it divulged nothing of military importance, nor did it provide any comfort for the King's enemies. An orderly, a fattish person with a fine mustache and scorched knees, was commanded to secure, seal and register the parcel. The tall officer with the good-humoured country-gentleman's face came to the balcony and discussed for a moment the production of literature under difficulties. "You know, we have very strict orders," he remarked, looking down thoughtfully. "We must be most careful . . . h—m . . . Neutral countries . . . America." He seemed to regard the idea of America with misgiving. I agreed that America was food for thought. "And you write books at sea?" he inquired. Yes, I said, anywhere, everywhere. He nodded. "It is, you know," I added slyly, "our national art." He looked grave at this and said he supposed so. By this time the orderly had tied and sealed *Aliens* in so many places that I pitied anyone who tried to tamper with it; and so, with an expression of my profound appreciation, I retired. The officer bowed, and the orderly and I clattered down stairs and made our way into the Rue de la Poste. He was a Londoner, and professed great interest in

literature, having a brother a news agent. We had some beer together, when *Aliens* had been safely bestowed. He was getting his leave soon, he said, and I informed him I hoped to get mine in a month or so. We drank to our three years' active service and to our safe trip home. He was much impressed by this coincidence, as he called it, and begged me, if I happened down Deptford way at all, to call and see him over his brother's shop. I asked him if he knew a certain old book-store in Deptford, where I had once gotten a Bandello's *Novelle* for four shillings, and he said he knew it well. But I think he only said this to please an obvious bibliomaniac. We parted with mutual good wishes, and I went back to the ship.

And so I send it to you, trusting to my good fortune to get it through. It may never reach you, and I shall have had my labour in vain. It may be, also, that ere it see the light I shall have gone away myself, an aggrieved participant in one of the trivial disasters of the sea-affair. But whatever betide, I shall have had my shot at the alluring yet ineluctable problem of human folly.

WILLIAM MCFEE.

Port Said, Egypt, April 14, 1917.



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ALIENS

CHAPTER I

THE "SCALDINO"

LONG before any of us three had seen him we had become aware of his existence, and our brains were continually busy about him. His appearance, his age, his gait, his history, his voice, even his ultimate destiny, we conjectured over and over again as one by one the evidences of his existence accumulated and developed in our consciousness. It grew to be quite a game with us, this collection of data, and filled in much of our leisure before we became acquainted with many of our neighbours.

I think Bill was the first to notice something unusual about the family next door, something neither English nor American. "What do you think!" she exclaimed, coming in one morning as I was busy writing. "She's got a little iron grate on legs, and there's charcoal burning in it."

"Who? Where?" I asked, coming out of my work with a start. I was composing an advertisement at the time.

"Mrs. Carville," said Bill, pointing to the window.

From the window, across the intervening plot of ground, we saw our neighbour stooping over one

of those small portable affairs so popular in Italy and known as *scaldini*, mere iron buckets in which coke or charcoal burns without flame, and which are carried from room to room as occasion arises.

"I thought," I said, "that she was Italian. That is a *scaldino*."

"Is it?" said Bill. "They'll set the house on fire if they use that here."

My friend is rather hard on the Mediterranean nations, giving as a reason "they are so dirty," but meaning, I imagine, that they lack our habits of order and dignified reticence. Their colonies in American cities and country-side are not models for town-planners and municipal idealists. And Bill has, in addition, much of the average Englishwoman's suspicion of foreign domestic economy. The past glories of Greece and Spain and Rome are nothing to her if the cooking utensils of the present generation are greasy or their glassware unpolished. There is, when one gets well away from them, quite a Dutch primness and staid rectangularity about English ideals in the matter of front and back yards, hen-runs, flower-beds and the like. And although her own small tract of New Jersey woefully failed to come anywhere near those same ideals she had a weakness for the gentle disparagement of Latin untidiness and lack of finish.

But, firm believers as we were in the authentic picturesqueness of American life, if we only looked for it, we had been struck more than once by the fugitive glimpses of herself which our neighbour had so far vouchsafed to us. To tell the bald truth, we

stood in awe of her. We discriminated between her and her environment. And we paid to her, in spite of our prejudices and limitations, a certain homage which beauty ever commands and receives, so potent is its inspiration to the hearts of men.

On revision, that word "beauty" scarcely stands its own in this connection, and for this reason. We three, deriving our entire sustenance from art in some guise or other, had widely divergent opinions upon the indispensable attributes of beauty *per se*. From my experience of artists, this condition of things is not unusual. We always agreed to differ, Bill rapturous among her flowers and revelling in their colour; Mac catching with a fine enthusiasm and assured technique the fugitive tints of a sunrise through a tracery of leaves and twigs; and I, quiescently receptive, pondering at intervals upon the sublime mystery of the human form, especially the grandiose renderings of it in the works of Michael Angelo. Thus it will be seen that I alone was unprejudiced in my predilections, and qualified, however inadequately, to do justice to Mrs. Carville. Mac was annoyed because she had cut down a tree. That it was her own tree made no difference. To cut down a living tree was, in Mac's view, a sacrilege. Bill had an additional grievance in the fact that Mrs. Carville not only grew no flowers herself, but permitted her chickens to wander deleteriously among ours.

A brief and passing glance from the street would have given a stranger no inkling of the state of affairs. Indeed, Mrs. Carville's domain and ours

were un-American in the fact that there had at one time been a fence between us. Even now it is a good enough fence in front; but it gradually degenerated until, at the bottom of the yards, it was a mere fortuitous concourse of rotten and smashed palings through which multitudinous armies of fowls came at unseasonable hours and against which all Bill's lady-like indignation was vented in vain. As we watched behind the curtains a Dorking stepped through and began to prospect among the sumach and stramonium that Bill had encouraged along our frontiers, under an illusion that plants labelled "poisonous" in her American gardening book would decimate the fowls.

"I wish they wouldn't," said Bill sadly, and added, "It's rotten, you know. I shall speak to them about it one of these days."

For myself, though trained habit enabled me to make note of the Dorking, my whole conscious attention was riveted upon the little group round the *scaldino* on the back porch. Mrs. Carville was, as I have said, stooping over the brazier. Her movements were being watched not only by ourselves, but by her two children. Fortunately, they were beyond her, their legs planted far apart, their hands behind them, so that I could see without stint the magnificent pose of the woman's body. Her arms hovered over the vessel, the left resting at times upon it, the other selecting pieces of fuel from a box at her side. The line of her back from hip to shoulder seemed incredibly straight and long. The cold wind that was blowing gustily and which

was the ostensible cause of her preparations, pressed her thin dress to her form and showed with sportive candour the fine modelling of bosom and limbs. Chiefly, however, I was attracted by the superb disdain in the poise of the head. It was a dark head, coiled heavily with black hair and set back in the hollow of the shoulders. Her face may be called dark too, the black eye-brows and olive skin being unrelieved by colour in the cheeks. Her whole expression was, you might say, forbidding, and I was not surprised when one of the boys received a push as he bent his head over the brazier. There was such an electric quickness in the gesture, such a dispassionate resumption of her former pose, that one involuntarily conceded to her a fierce and peremptory disposition. One felt that such a woman would listen with some impatience to complaints about predatory fowls, that she would stand no nonsense from her children either, that . . .

The same thought flashed through our minds simultaneously, and in strict accordance with our differing temperaments Bill voiced it.

"I wonder if they don't get on," she said.

"I wonder," I assented.

The brazier full, Mrs. Carville rose, the handle in her hand. Pointing to the box, she spoke to her children, who hastily removed it to a shed at the bottom of the yard. She turned to enter the house, her large black eyes swept our windows in a swift comprehensive glance of suspicion and then she vanished.

I retired hastily to my desk, acutely conscious

that we had been, well, that we had been impolite! Bill went away without speaking, and for a couple of hours I was absorbed in my work. Growing weary of the thing, I took up my pipe and went upstairs to the studio.

"Just in time for tea," said Bill. "Have a cookie?"

The studio was in some disorder, and the atmosphere was heavy with the odour of printer's ink. The etching press had been dragged out from the wall, trays of water, bottles of benzine, rags of muslin, rolls of paper, palettes of ink, copper plates and all the *matériel* of etching were lying in considerable confusion about the room, and Mac himself, draped in a blue cotton overall, stood in negligent attitude against an easel, drinking a cup of tea. I had caught the phrase, "They're a funny lot," and I divined that Bill's hasty offer of cookies was a mere ruse to put me off the track of a possibly interesting conversation.

"Finished?" asked Mac, passing me a cup of tea.

"Not yet," I replied. "Another thousand words will do it, though."

Mac, in accordance with a vow made in all sincerity, and approved by us, set apart one day a week for etching, just as I was supposed to consecrate some part of my time to literature. At first we were to work together, select themes, write them up and illustrate them conjointly. This, we argued, could not fail to condense into fame and even wealth. Our friend Hooker had done this, and *he* had climbed to a one-man show in Fifth Avenue.

But by some fatality, whenever Mac took a day off for high art, on that day did I invariably feel sordidly industrious. I might idle for a week, smoking too much and getting in Bill's way as she busied herself with housework, but as soon as the etching-press scraped across the studio-floor, or Mac came down with camera and satchel and dressed for a tramp, I became the victim of a mania for work, and stuck childishly to my desk. Personally I did not believe in Hooker's story at all. Hooker's mythical librettist never materialized. I was always on the look-out for a secondhand book containing Hooker's letterpress. It suited the others to believe in him, but even a writer of advertising booklets and "appreciations" has a certain literary instinct that cannot be deceived. And so I felt, as I have said, sordidly industrious and inclined to look disparagingly upon a man who was frittering away his time with absurd scratchings upon copper and whose hands were just then in a most questionable condition.

"I thought you were going to help me," he sneered over his cup.

"The fit was on me," I explained, and my eye roved round the studio. I caught sight of a piece of paper on a chair. Mac made a movement to pick it up, but he was hampered by the cup and saucer, and I secured it.

"Ah—h!" I remarked, and they two regarded each other sheepishly. "Very good indeed, old man!"

And it was very good. With the slap-dash

economy of effort which he had learned of Van Roon, when that ill-fated genius was in Chelsea, Mac had caught the salient curves and angles of Mrs. Carville as she stooped over her *scaldino*, had caught to a surprising degree the sombre expression of her face and the tigerish energy of her crouched body. I studied it with great pleasure for a moment, and then it recurred to me that he had not been with us at the window. I say recurred, though I had known it all along, and my ejaculation, for that matter, was but a sign of triumph over catching him at the same game of peeping-Tom that we had been playing in the room below. Yet so quickly and over-lappingly do our minds work that at the same moment I had no less than three blurred emotions. I was pleased to find my friend was guilty, I was pleased with the sketch, yet puzzled to know how he had come to make it. Suddenly I saw light.

"You were on the stairs?" I said, and pointed with the paper over my shoulder. He nodded.

"Happened to look out," he remarked, setting his cup down.

It is my custom to risk a good deal sometimes by uttering thoughts which my friends are free to disown. They may not be quite honest in this, but none the less, according to the social contract, they are free to disown. So, in this case, when I said, "I wonder if they are really married," both of these generous souls repudiated the suggestion at once.

"But you must admit we have some reason for

suspicion," I went on, looking into my cup. "Of course, I am not speaking now as a gentleman——"

"No," said Bill, maliciously. I continued.

"——but as an investigator into the causes of psychological phenomena. Placing them upon the dissecting-table, so to speak, and probing with the forceps of observation and the needle of wit——"

"Rubbish!" snorted the etcher rudely, turning to his plates.

"But, my dear chap!" I urged, "let me explain. I happened to be reading Balzac last night, that is all. You know how stimulating he is, and how readily one falls in with his plans for forming a complete Science of Applied Biology of the human race. Put it another way if you like. What are the facts? *Item:* A grass widow, obviously foreign, presumably Italian. *Item:* Two children indisputably American, one fair, the other dark. *Item:* A scaldino. *Item:* Male clothing on the line. *Item:* A reserved attitude toward her intelligent and cultivated neighbours. *Item:* Ignorance of the well-known fact that the Indian Summer is now setting in. *Item:* ——shall I go on? Have we not here evidence sufficiently discrepant to warrant a certain conjecture?"

"Male clothing, you said?" remarked Bill, a certain respect for my perspicacity in her manner; "When?"

"The last time I came home with the milk," I replied. "The moon was shining with some brilliance. As I looked out of my window before getting into bed I saw some one moving over there.

A further scrutiny revealed to me a number of undeniable suits of pyjamas which were being taken hurriedly from the line."

"You didn't say anything about it before?"

"No, because I attached no significance to the fact before. To tell you the truth, I was under the impression that they were doing laundry work and that, to conceal the fact more effectively, they were doing the male garments at night. We had not then heard the item I was waiting permission to enumerate."

"Is it one we know or one you're going to spring on us?" inquired the lady, reaching out for my cup.

"You may know it," I replied. Mac was bending over his plate, rubbing the ink in with deft fingers, and I saw his lowered glance flutter in my direction for a moment.

"You mean Mac knows and you don't feel sure whether he's told me," interpreted Bill, shaking the tea-pot. I laughed.

"Into that we will not go," I said. "Suffice it that if he knows it was because I told him."

"I *knew* it was something you were ashamed of," she exclaimed, triumphantly. "Go on: out with it!"

"How can I be ashamed of it since I am about to tell you?" I demanded, incautiously.

"Why, because your love of scandal is so tremendous that you sacrifice even yourself to it!" she answered.

"Thank you," I said. "Here is my item: They correspond."

"*That's* nothing to go on!" cried the lady. I dared no more than smile. Mac grinned as he

lifted the plate from the gas stove and, giving it a final polish, carried it to the press. "Oh, well!" went on Bill, irrelevantly, "let us all be honest and say we're interested. If he exists, he will come along some time."

The press creaked and the spokes turned. We both paused involuntarily as Mac bent over and lifted the blankets. This is always a moment of anxiety. It was a theory among us that when Samuel Johnson wrote "The Vanity of Human Wishes" he had been pulling proofs from copper. Bill had confessed to me that she could not help holding her breath, sometimes. Her husband turned upon us with a smile of satisfaction.

"If we're all going to be honest," he remarked, "we all ought to know as much as each other, eh? Well then, tell us about the correspondence, old man. What do you know?"

"Miss Fraenkel . . ." I began, and Bill breathed, "I knew it!"

"In the course of a casual conversation," I continued, "Miss Fraenkel mentioned to me the fact that letters pass between them. In a way, I suppose, she shouldn't do it. A postmistress is in a delicate position. And yet why not? One may say without prejudice that a certain man writes to his wife. We might even have assumed it, since we see the postman deliver letters with our own eyes. Miss Fraenkel, however, overstepped the bounds of prudence when she implied something wrong. Her exact words, as far as I can remember, were, 'It is funny he writes from New York.'"

"Does he?" said Bill.

"So Miss Fraenkel says. So you see, your . . . our unspoken thoughts were justified, to say the least. We may recast *Item one* and say, A grass widow, undoubtedly Italian, with a husband in New York, twenty miles away."

"Well, in that case it's no business of ours," said Mac, as he spread the heavy viscid ink upon a new plate. "They may have their troubles, but it's pretty clear they don't need our sympathy, do they?"

"No," assented Bill.

"But what becomes of our inquiry?" I protested. "My dear Mac, this does credit to your kind heart, but since we are agreed to be honest, let us have the fruits of our honesty. Consider that anyhow we are doing them no harm. You are too gentle. Indeed, I think that we have been stand-offish. Why should not Bill call and—er—leave a card?"

"Me! Call on an Italian?" The voice was almost shrill.

"A neighbourly act," I remarked. "And we may find out something."

"We're a pretty lot, us and our honesty," put in Mac, in some disgust, rubbing his nose with the back of his wrist.

"My dear friends," I said, "I give you my word of honour that is how modern novels are made. If you put an end to espionage the book market would be given over entirely to such works as 'The Automobile and How to Drive It' and 'Jane Austen and Her Circle.'"

"Then it's a very shady trade, mean and dishonourable," said Mac.

"We agreed upon that, you remember, when my novel was refused publication," I said, laughing.

"Yes," said Bill. "But when they accepted it, you got very stuck-up and refused to write any advertisements for a fortnight and said that whoever had written a good book was one of a noble company, and a lot more of it. It depends on the point of view."

"Of course it does, *ma mie*. In this case, the honest point of view is the one we must take. We must forget for a moment that we are English lady and gentlemen——"

"Never!" said Bill, firmly, lighting a cigarette.

"——and remember that we are students of life. What would Balzac or Flaubert have known of life if they had been merely gentlemen? Nothing! What does a gentleman know? Nothing. What does he do in the world? Nothing. Of what use is he beyond his interest as a vestige of a defunct feudalism? This is the Twentieth Century, in the United States of America, not the——"

"Oh stop, stop!" she said, laughing. "Go down and get that thousand words finished."

I went.

CHAPTER II

HIS CHILDREN

IT was a week later, and we were sitting on the verandah looking out across Essex County towards Manhattan. To us, who some five years before had been shaken from our homestead in San Francisco and hurried penniless and almost naked across the continent, our location here in the Garden State, looking eastward towards the Western Ocean and our native isle, had always appeared as "almost home." We endeavoured to impress this upon our friends in England, explaining that "we could be home in four or five days easily"; and what were four or five days? True, we have never gone so far as to book our passage; but there is undoubted comfort in the fact that in a week at the outside, we could walk down Piccadilly. Out on the Pacific Slope we were, both physically and spiritually, a world away.

It pleased us, too, to detect in the configuration of the district a certain identity with our own county of Essex, in England, where a cousin of Bill's had a cottage, and where, some day, we were to have a cottage too. Our home is called *Wigboro' House*, after the cousin's, and we have settled it that, just as you catch a glimpse of grey sea across Mersea Island from Wigborough, so we may catch the glint and glare of the lights of Manhattan, and, on stormy nights, feel on our lips the sharpness of

the salt wind that blows across Staten Island from the Atlantic. It is an innocent conceit, and our only critic so far had been Miss Fraenkel, who had objected to the name, and advocated with American succinctness the advantage of a number. As Bill had remarked mournfully, "It wouldn't be so bad if it was number three or four, but *Five hundred and Eighty-two Van Diemen's Avenue* is horrible!" We had given in to Miss Fraenkel of course, save that none of us had the courage to disillusion Bill's cousin. We still received from him letters addressed in his sprawling painter's hand "*Wigboro' House, Netley Heights, N. J., U. S. A.,*" a mail or so late. We never told him of *Van Diemen's Avenue*, nor for that matter had we mentioned our neighbours. Curiously enough, it was he, that painter cousin of Bill's, thousands of miles away in that other Essex, who told *us* something that we were only too quick to appreciate, about our neighbours.

We were talking of him, I remember, that afternoon as we sat on the stoop, Bill saying he would be writing soon, and Mac raising the vexed question of the Fourth Chair. You see, we have four rocking-chairs on our verandah, though there are but three of us, and Bill usually claims the hammock. It was no answer, I found, to suggest future friends as occupants for this chair. It grew to be a legend that some day I should bring home a bride and she should have it. I submitted to this badinage and even hinted that at first we should need but one chair. . . . I had heard . . . nay seen, such things in San Francisco, before the earthquake. In the

meantime I had vamped up a very pretty story of the painter-cousin getting a commission to paint a *prima-donna* in New York and coming over to visit us in great state. He might be induced to sit awhile in the vacant chair. It seemed more probable than Bill's legend, for I knew Miss F——, anybody I married, say, would want the hammock. There was one drawback to my dream, and that was the humiliation of revealing to him Van Diemen's Avenue. He is a university man, and from his letters and Bill's description I should say he has a rather embarrassing laugh when he finds a person out in a deception like that. But so far he had not yet received a commission to paint a *prima-donna* in New York, and he still pictures our Wigboro' house standing alone on Netley Heights, looking out across rolling country to the sea. Of course the photos that we send do not show any other houses near, and the verandahs make the place look bigger than it really is. He must be tremendously impressed, too, by Bill's courageous declaration (in inverted commas) that at the back the land is ours "as far as the eye can see." It is true, too, though the eye cannot see very far. There is a "dip," you know, common enough to Triassic regions; and as you stand at the back door and look westward the sky comes down and touches our cabbages, fifty yards away. It does, really!

Well, we were talking of him and incidentally of the Fourth Chair, when the children came round the corner of the house and, finding us there, stood looking at us.

That is all; just stood staring at us, with feet planted firmly on the gravel, hands in pockets and an expression of unwinking candour in their young eyes. It was absurd, of course, that we three grown-ups should have been so embarrassed by a couple of urchins, but we were. The cool nerve of it, the unimaginable audacity of it, took our breath away. It was almost as though they were saying, "Well, and what are you doing here, hey?" There was something almost indelicate in their merciless scrutiny. We quailed.

There was, moreover, a deeper reason for our disquietude. We realized, afterward, that those children, one dark and one fair, had been quite unconscious of our existence before. Numberless times they had passed us, even crossing our land on a short cut to the forest road, but without recognition. And though, in a pause between two absorbing interests, in a moment of disengagement from the more important matters of American childhood, they now deigned to favour us with their frank attention, it was rather disparagement than curiosity they exhibited. We now know the feelings of a Living Wonder in a show.

"Hello," remarked the elder, the dark one, dispassionately, and we almost jumped. The other child fixed his eye on my slippers, which were of carpet and roomy. It seemed to me that the time had come to tell them of their lack of good manners.

"Hello, little boy," I replied. I decided to approach the subject of manners circuitously.

"You ain't so very big yerself," said the elder

boy, quite without emotion and merely as a stated fact. I admit freely that this, in the jargon of the streets, was "one on me." My general diminutiveness of person has always been more than compensated, I think, by a corresponding magnitude of mind; but one is none the less sensitive to wayside ribaldry. I have never been able to quench a certain satisfaction in the fact that the children who mocked the prophet were devoured by bears. An occasional example is certainly wholesome, if only to bring young people to their senses.

"You mustn't speak like that," I said, gently. "What is your name?"

"What yo' want to know for?" came the answer, and he joined his brother in examining my slippers. The baffling thing was that there was really nothing intentionally rude about these two rather pretty little fellows. They were merely exhibiting, in a somewhat disconcerting fashion, it is true, the influence of republican freedom upon natures unwarped by feudal traditions of courtesy and *noblesse oblige*. It was baffling, as I say, but encouraging for all that. I felt that if the others could restrain their indignation and I could school myself to pursue the catechism, I should eventually discover some avenue of inquiry that might lead to fresh knowledge of the *ménage* next door. I tried again.

"Well, you see," I explained, "we would like to get acquainted with you. You tell us your names and we'll tell you ours. Eh?"

"I know your name, I do," he said, glancing at my face for a moment. I put out my hand to calm

Bill's restlessness. It appeared afterwards that she "thought she was going to choke."

"Gee! you do? Well then, you can tell me yours," I went on.

"Giuseppe Mazzini Carville," he returned, and before we fully realized the stupendous possibilities which this implied the younger child raised his eyes to our faces.

"Want to know my name too?" he queried, not a quiver of an eyelid to show any self-consciousness.

"Of course," I said; "what is it?" We waited an instant, breathlessly.

"Benvenuto Cellini Carville," he pronounced carefully, and added as an afterthought, "I'm Ben; he's Beppo."

"Fancy giving a child a name like that!" muttered Bill, compassionately. "I call it a shame!" And she leaned over towards the two children. "Do you know my name then?" she asked.

The clear, steady eyes rested for a moment upon her face, and a slight smile curved the lips of the elder as he answered.

"Ma calls you the woman with two husbands," he remarked.

"Oh!" said Bill, and fell back into the hammock.

"Say, Kiddo," said Mac, reaching out a long arm and capturing them, "what do they teach you down in that old school anyway, eh?"

They squirmed.

"It is useless to try and force anything out of them," I warned. "Remember the school-teacher is

forbidden by law even to touch them." They slipped away from his knee, and stood as before.

"Listen," I continued. "Got a father, Beppo?"

He surveyed me with some slight astonishment.

"Sure," he replied. "Of course I got a father, silly."

"Well, where is he?"

They looked at each other, their arms folded behind them, their toes digging the gravel.

"At sea," said Beppo, and Mac slapped his knee.

"Eh?" I said, blankly, for I had not caught the phrase.

"We are a lot of duffers!" muttered Mac. "The man is a sailor and he's at sea."

"Oh!" I said, and for a moment I felt downcast at the tame ending of our investigation. "When is he coming home, Beppo?"

"I dunno," he answered, indifferently. "What do you want to know for?"

Here was a quandary. I was caught fairly and squarely prying into another person's business. I don't know why, but these two little chaps, with their clean-cut unembarrassed features, their relentless stare and their matter-of-fact outlook upon life, seemed to have in a supreme degree the faculty of inspiring and snubbing curiosity. I think the others, since I had borne the brunt of the ordeal, sympathized with me, for they were silent. I stared at our visitors in some perplexity; and then in the most exasperating manner they turned away and ran across our ground to a huge hollow stump near the forest path and began to play.

"Pretty tough, eh?" murmured Mac, rocking

himself. I began to wonder whether I ought to have been more indignant about that reflection upon my height. Bill looked up and twisted round so that she could see what they were doing.

"What are they playing?" she whispered. No one answered. I was thinking. Sailor—sixty dollars a month rent—Italian wife—letters from New York.

"I will see," I said, and stepping down I walked across to the stump.

I was fully resolved to sift the matter as far as I could to the bottom. I was aware of the disadvantage of being a small man, for I saw that I should be compelled to climb up to look into the stump. But with small stature is often joined a certain tenacious, terrier-like fortitude. I advanced with firmness.

Ben was nowhere to be seen. Beppo, a stick on his shoulder, stood in a statuesque pose in front of the stump.

"G'way!" he hissed, as I came up.

"What's the game?" I whispered.

"Indians. I'm on guard. G'way!" he whispered back.

"Is this the fort?" I searched for a foothold.

"Yep. This is the middle-watch. What'd you butt in for?"

I scrambled up and looked. Just below me, lying on a soft bed of mouldering tinder wood and leaves, was Benvenuto Cellini Carville, simulating profound slumber. As I clung there, a somewhat undignified figure, he opened one eye.

"Let me play too?" I pleaded.

"Can you follow a trail?" said Beppo's voice at my side.

"Sure."

"Well, you go down there," he pointed to Bill's cabbage patch, "and be a hostile, see?"

I saw. As I slipped down and hastened away as directed (avoiding the cabbages), it seemed to me absurdly paradoxical that the only way to be friendly with these precocious beings was to be a "hostile." I looked round. Beppo stood at rigid attention, and at the studio back window I saw two grinning heads surveying my performance. I was not at all clear in my mind how a hostile should act; it was thirty years since I had read "Deer-slayer." Should I drop on my knees and crawl through the long grass, snooping round the bean-poles and taking the devoted block-house in flank? I swallowed my stiff-necked English pride and began to crawl. Then I saw a better plan. I slipped through the sparse line of dwarf oaks smothered with crimson poison-ivy that bordered the forest path and crept as silently as I could towards the street until I was abreast of the stump. As I paused Beppo was making his round of the fort and espied me. Instantly crying "Hostiles!" he presented his stick, banged, reloaded, banged again, reloaded and banged yet again. I took up a stick and presented it—bang! With amazing verisimilitude Beppo rolled over—shot through the heart. Really, for a moment I had a mad apprehension that in some occult way, some freak of hypnotic

suggestion, I had actually wrought the child harm. I stood there breathlessly triumphant and wondering whether it was now my business to rush in and scalp the defenceless prisoners. I became aware of a head and a stick above the stump.

"Bang!" said the garrison. Obviously I was shot. I fell, desperately wounded, and endeavoured to drag myself away into the forest of dwarf oaks, when the garrison hailed me.

"Surrender!" he called, presenting his piece. I put up my hands. He climbed down nimbly.

"Now you help me bring in the dead and wounded," he ordered, and together we, the victorious garrison, dragged the slain warrior into the shadow of the stump. All at once he became alive, jumped up and danced gleefully.

"Say, that's bully!" he chanted. "You play some Indian!"

I looked down modestly and blushed I fear, for I knew that the grinning heads were still at the studio window.

"Well," I said, picking the thistle burrs off my trousers, "let us sit down for a spell, shall we?" To my surprise, they consented. We went round to the stoop and I took a big rocker. For a moment they stared, as though considering me in the new light of a perfect "hostile."

"Say," began Beppo, "what you doin' in there?" and he pointed to the house.

"What do you want to know for?" I retorted, humorously, stroking his dark head. I am fond of children in a way, especially boys. He twisted his

head away, but without ill-temper, and looked at me gravely.

"Don't you work?" he demanded.

"A little, sometimes," I replied earnestly, feeling for my cigarettes.

"What sort of work?" said Benvenuto, standing in front of me.

"We make pictures," I said, evasively. I have a silly reluctance to talk of literature as work.

"Huh!" they remarked, and surveyed me afresh.

"What does your father work at?" I asked, cautiously.

"He's at sea," said Beppo.

And that was all they knew. I tried the question in many ways, but they had no other answer. Evidently they had grown up with that phrase in their ears, "at sea," and were satisfied.

"Don't you want to see him?" I suggested. They "supposed so." I left that subject.

"How old are you?"

"Seven," said Beppo. "Ben's six."

"You are very precocious," I remarked, to myself chiefly.

"How?"

"Precocious," I repeated, rising to meet the postman. He handed me several business letters and one for Bill with an English stamp, a fat package.

"Who's that from?" asked Beppo, and I was pulling his ear gently as Bill came out with a rush. The postman went along to the next house.

At this moment my perceptions became blurred. I remember handing the letters to Bill and Mac. I

remember the quick scuffle of the two children as they hastened toward their own home. All this is blurred. What stands out sharply in my memory is the figure of Mrs. Carville, her waist pressed hard against the fence, a long envelope in her hand, gesticulating to the children as they went towards her. I saw her wave them peremptorily indoors and then remain by the fence, regarding me with profound distrust. I made a step forward to speak, for I should have had to shout at that distance, but she turned and swung up the steps of her porch and slammed the door.

"A letter from Cecil," said Bill as I took my seat, a little downcast at the encounter. Cecil is the painter-cousin, at Wigborough, Essex, England.

"What does he say?" I inquired.

"Read it to us," said she, and handed me a dozen sheets of tracing paper pinned together.

I began to read.

CHAPTER III

A LETTER FROM WIGBOROUGH

“**D**EAR BILL,—At last I find myself with an hour or so to spare, so here goes! How are you all? Well, I hope. I received your little present on the anniversary. Many thanks, old girl. How on earth do you remember the date of everybody’s birthday? Honestly, I should have let it pass without noticing if that wee book had not arrived two days before. So you see, you *are* of some use in the world, after all! (This is a joke.) How’s Mac getting on with the etching? Tell him I’ve taken to using only forty per cent. nitric acid in distilled water. This gives very good results for all ordinary work, much more certain than the nitrous, and doesn’t make such a stink. There’s no demand just now for modern work, in England at any rate. I can hardly believe what you say about the shows in New York. London’s dead for etchers. Every dealer is clamorous for copies of the old masters. The rotten thing is that it pays better than doing original work, you know. I have a job on now—twenty plates at £50 a plate, simply copying Girtins and Bartolozzis. I shall do four plates a year. I take things pretty easily, work in the morning, potter round the garden in the afternoon, tennis and cycling when the weather permits. This has been a terrible summer. English weather gets worse, I believe. We had rain for a solid week in

July. I was out on a tramp through the midlands and got caught in it, which reminds me of a most remarkable chap I met at the time. I really must tell you about him, because I don't remember anyone who has so impressed his *personality* upon me as this man did.

"It was this way. I had been sketching round about Market Overton, and getting rather sick of the incessant rain, so I packed up my knapsack and started home. It really is much more jolly walking in the rain than sitting in a stuffy inn parlour waiting for it to stop. Well, at Peterboro' I heard the country eastward was flooded and farmers ruined. Of course, my road lay through March and Ely to Newmarket and Colchester, and I wouldn't believe the boys who called to me that I'd be stopped; but sure enough, not two miles east of Peterboro' the road slid under water and people were punting themselves about on doors, and cooking their grub upstairs. In the fields the hay-cocks and corn-ricks were just showing themselves above the water. It made one's heart ache for the farmers. Well, I turned back, of course, and took the London road to Huntingdon, which runs high all the way to Alconbury. I was getting jolly tired and wondering if I should find a decent bed before I reached Huntingdon, when I came to Saxon Cross. At the cross-roads stands a fine inn all by itself, and to judge by the names and addresses in the visitors' book, it is nearly as well known in America as in England. The Saxon Cross Hotel is not really a hotel at all, being a hunting

inn. But it is very comfortable, with brushes hung all round the walls and fine old engravings of sporting scenes in all the rooms.

"At first I only went into the bar-parlour to get a drink. It was rather dark in there, for it was very near sunset and the windows were small, and I had slipped off my knapsack and dropped into a big comfortable chair before I noticed a clean-shaven man with a big hooked nose and gleaming eyes seated in the far corner. It was like the beak of a bird, that nose, and I was so fascinated by it that I didn't answer the landlord when he came in and said 'Good evening.' The man opposite said 'Good evening' too, so I suppose that it must have been just a mistaken idea of mine, but I really thought at first that he had something against me, his glance was so confoundedly malevolent. He was a tall young chap in a Norfolk suit with a soft silk collar and scarlet tie, russia-leather shoes and a watch in an alligator case on his left wrist. A gentleman evidently by the look of him and when he said to me, in the refined voice of the ordinary university man, 'Are you walking down country?' I made up my mind that he was O. K. and began to converse.

"One thing rather puzzled me, and that was the fact that he and the landlord did not speak to each other. While I was drinking my whisky they both talked to me and I to them, but they did not exchange a word. I thought it was strange that a landlord should ignore a guest like that, especially as the guest didn't look as if he would stand much

ignoring. Indeed, there was a sort of glint in his dark eyes as he made the most ordinary remark that struck me as particularly baleful. However, we talked of the floods and my tramp and hunting, etc., and finally I decided to stop the night there. The landlord went off to order supper and my new friend came over and sat down beside me. Somehow or other I found myself talking over old times. On thinking the matter over I have come to the conclusion that it was his use of one or two words like 'tool,' meaning 'to run hard,' that led me to accept him as one of us. 'Topping' was another word. Before I was aware of it, and without his definitely stating the fact, I was treating him as a public-school man.

"Do you know Surrey?" he asked me. 'It's rather jolly.'

"I know Guildford," I said. 'I was at school there.'

"Were you really?" he replied, and he began to hum '*As I was going to Salisbury*,' which is Winchester and nothing else as you will remember. That settled it, and I asked him whose house he was in. 'Jerry Bud's,' he told me. 'I was in old Martin's,' I said. 'Did you know Belvoir? He was in Bud's.'

"The wine merchant's son?" he said, and I nodded.

"He gave me a curious look at this, as though he was suspicious of me. 'Seen him lately?' he asked. 'Not for years,' I said. 'What became of him?' 'Oh, I don't know,' he said as though

relieved. 'I thought perhaps *you'd* kept it up. He went into the army, I believe.'

"We talked on like this, giving each other little items of information about different fellows we knew, and gradually I gave him my own history, what there is of it. There isn't much, as you know; Slade, Beaux Arts, Chelsea, and now Wigborough. He wasn't a bit interested, didn't seem to know what the word *artist* meant. Regular stereotyped public-school man in that. And he didn't offer me a drink, I noticed, after we had had a peg or two at my expense. However, when the bath was ready and I got up to go to it, he said, 'I'll take supper with you if you don't mind.' I said, 'with pleasure,' 'charmed,' of course, and all that sort of thing, and went off. I met the landlord as I was coming down and buttonholed him. He told me all about it at once.

"'Mr. Carville, sir? Yes, that's his name. Well, it's a rather curious case. I don't know what to make of it myself. He came down here with a party of university gentlemen about a month ago. Very nice gentlemen they were, sir, and were very free with their money, Mr. Carville especially. And then they all went off except him with a motorin' party that spent a week-end here. Mr. Carville he said they was coming back, you see, and he'd wait for 'em. Well, that's three weeks gone and he's still here as you see. He says that he expects a cheque any day, but up to the present——.'

"'Why, hasn't he got any money?' I said.

"'Well, at present, sir, there's a month's bill.

Bein' a gentleman, of course, I knew it 'ud be all right, so I let it run.'

"'Perhaps he's overdrawn,' I said.

"'It's possible, sir,' said the landlord.

"Well, I went down to supper, full of the poor chap's story, and found him at the table walking into a hefty veal-and-ham pie, and with a bottle of wine at his elbow.

"'Come on,' he says, 'or you'll be too late.'

"We went at it and made a good meal, and he accepted one of my cigars. It suddenly occurred to me that I knew nothing definite about the man. He hadn't even told me his profession. He wasn't *Church*, that was clear. He wasn't Navy. I didn't think he was Bar either. Army? Yes, but you know a chap in the army is bound to let something out about himself in the course of conversation. And, moreover, you don't find army men hiding in hunting hotels in July. Carville? Carville? And then I decided he was proud and kept quiet for fear I would offer him a loan. Poor chap!

"There was no one else staying at the Saxon Cross Hotel that night, and we had the big smoking-room to ourselves. And after a time I put it to him pointblank: 'What on earth are you hanging about down here for, man?'

"'Simply because,' said he, 'I haven't the cash to pay my bill, and the inland revenue has run dry.'

"'Where do you bank?' I asked, and he slapped his pocket.

"'Pa's bank,' he replied, 'but he is in a bit of a

temper with me, I think. If I could only get up to town.'

"'Why didn't you explain to the landlord?' I asked him. He looked at me with a scowl. 'I don't explain anything to people of that class,' he said.

"'What'll you take?' I asked him, and he leaned over and put his face close to mine. 'Oh, damn the money,' he said. 'The fellow will take an IOU if you endorse it.' 'Nay,' I said. 'Let me pay it, and when your ship comes home, all right.' He took another whisky. 'Will you?' he said. 'Will you help a stranger like that?'

"'An old public school man is not a stranger,' I said. 'I think your pals are rather a rotten lot to leave you in the lurch like this.' 'Fair weather friends,' he answered. 'Young men with too much money. Very decent chaps so long as you have plenty of cash. Very awkward. I have business in town as a matter of fact. Will you really take my IOU for this? It's only a few quid, you know.'

¶ "It was fourteen pounds, and took up the balance of my holiday stock. Rather foolish I know you will say, but after all we ought to stand by each other. And it was worth it. Honestly, it was worth it! That chap became the most animated creature in Huntingdonshire when the arrangement was concluded. He opened the piano and sang song after song, he jabbered at me in French, he got on the big table and danced, he took a tumbler and a napkin and did conjuring tricks, he ordered a bottle of brandy and cigars. I was rather tired when I came in, but he would have none of it. He

told me stories, and I judged he must have traveled a good deal. He asked me if I knew anything about automobiles. I rather wondered at this. 'I am going to take up an agency,' he said. 'That's why I want to get to town.' It seemed a mad thing for a gentleman to do, and I said so. He darted a fierce look at me over his glass of brandy. 'It takes a gentleman to sell to a gentleman,' he said.

"I didn't lie awake very long after we did go to bed, I can assure you. We took our candles, I remember, and I told him we must breakfast together. The next thing I remember was the chambermaid knocking at my door and saying it was ten o'clock. Of course he was gone. You've been expecting me to tell you that, I suppose. So he had gone and I was fourteen pounds to the bad, unless he redeemed his IOU. He had told the landlord to drive him into Peterboro'; and as I came down to breakfast the trap returned. Of course, neither of us ever expected to see him again, and when I looked at his IOU in the cold light of the day, it seemed a very flimsy guarantee for my money. There was only one thing about that IOU. It was written on the unused page torn from a letter, and the watermark of the paper was Lydgate Bond. It was the same size as Trojan Club paper too, for you know I belong to the Trojan Club, and Trojans are not men who write to outsiders much. Not on club paper anyway. In fact, the very audacity of the man led me to blame myself for doubting him. He had not behaved just as a gentleman should, but on the other hand he had done nothing underhand. There was a

damn-you look about him that made it unbelievable that he was a fraud. Soon after breakfast I set out on my tramp, and, going through Stilton and Huntingdon, made for Cambridge. All the way along I could not help thinking about my boon companion of the night before, and wondering if I should ever meet him again. It seemed very unlikely. He was so interesting, quite apart from his peculiar financial position, and he gave one such an impression of indomitable will power, with his hawk-like face and brilliant eyes, that I wished I had made some sketches of him. But he had not even asked to see my portfolio.

“Two or three days later I reached home, and in the general worry of getting into harness again I forgot my gentleman for a while. It so happened, however, that my dealer, about a fortnight later, asked me to run up and call at his place in the Haymarket, as he had a commission for me and his client wanted to see me. I biked into Colchester and took the train to London. Business over, I went round to look in at the Trojan’s before I took a taxi for Liverpool Street. Just as I turned into Dover Street, an enormous claret-coloured car came up with a horrible noise on the horn, and stopped at the Trojan’s door-step. I know there are plenty of cars of large size about, but this one was overwhelming. Everything about it was huge. The head-light was as big as a dog-kennel, and the steering-wheel was a yard across. As the car stopped, a lot of fellows got out of the *tonneau* and the driver followed, taking off his goggles.

“Yes, my dear Bill, it is just as you imagine. The driver was my companion of the Saxon Cross Hotel. He recognized me at once as I turned to enter the Club. He really was a big man and he looked much bigger in his long motoring overall than in his knickerbockers. ‘Great Scott!’ he exclaimed. ‘It’s you! Do come in. I say, you chaps,’ he called. ‘Here’s a bit of luck. A friend of mine.’ I was introduced, and he towered over me smiling, his great hook nose dividing his face and distracting one’s attention from his eyes. We sat down to tea, and he told the other men the tale of our meeting, omitting any mention of the fourteen pounds, however, for which I was rather glad. I shouldn’t like those chaps to think I was a bally usurer. I made a move to go, but he wouldn’t hear of it. I was to go to his place to dinner. We went in the car. It was more like an omnibus than a private vehicle. I sat beside him as we flew down Dover Street, across Piccadilly and into St. James’. He told me he had sold three cars like this in a week to Lord This and the Duke of That—I forget the names. He told me, moreover, that his commission on each car was four hundred pounds. And when we reached his chambers and I saw his furniture and flowers and pictures and servants’ livery, I could quite believe it. He was living at the rate of ten thousand a year. Well, we dined as we were, Carville insisting that as I was up from the country they should bar evening dress for one night. This was rather pretty in its way, and I found he was a curious mixture of prettiness and downright brutal ruthlessness. I

found a man I knew slightly among the guests, a chap named Effon, son of the soap man, and he told me that Carville was one of the most extraordinary men he had ever met, that women would almost come to him at the crooking of his finger, and even men of mature age were dominated by him. And, as a matter of fact, soon after Effon told me this, there was a case in point. Carville's flat looked from the second floor on St. James' Street. One of the men who lived at Chislehurst wanted to catch the 12.6 at Victoria and mentioned casually to the servant to bring a car round. 'You won't catch the 12.6,' says Carville. 'Oh, yes, I shall,' said the other man. 'I bet you a fiver you won't,' says Carville. 'Done,' said the other. It was about twenty minutes to twelve then, and in the buzz of conversation and a couple of games of cards Carville forgot his bet for a moment. Suddenly he saw that the fellow was gone. He rushed to the door and found it locked. Of course we all saw the game, and believed that Carville would laugh and admit himself out-manceuvred. Not a bit of it. He turned on us, one hand on the door handle, and his face grew absolutely black with rage. Honest Injun, I was scared of him then! He bounded across the room, opened the window, sprang out upon the big stone coping and ran along to the next flat. Here he opened the window—(I've heard afterward that the people were just getting into bed)—stepped in, explained he was doing it for a bet, ran to the door, down the stairs, and taking a flying leap from the

top step landed with both feet on the bonnet of the car just as it was starting. Of course, he smashed the sparking plugs, ignition gear and a lot of other details. We all crowded to the window and looked out. He had won his bet.

"He came back smiling and assuring the chap that the morning would do just as well for Chislehurst. The party broke up soon after and we went to bed. At breakfast the next morning he was charming, wrote me a cheque for the money, sitting in a gilt chair and writing on a Louis Seize secretaire.

"‘I forgot about you,’ he told me. ‘I had to rush round rather when I came to town, and it put the matter out of my head. You don’t go in for motoring, I suppose, down in Essex?’ I said, no, I was working. He looked at his watch. ‘I race to-day at three,’ he said. ‘Where?’ I asked. ‘I’d like to go to see it.’ ‘Ashby-de-la-Zouch,’ he answered. ‘It takes just three hours to run down.’ Of course, I couldn’t go down into Leicestershire, and said so. He smiled ‘another time.’ We exchanged cards again and his man called a cab for me. A chauffeur came up with a prodigiously long-bonneted and low-seated machine, and Carville followed me down stairs. He got in and waved his hand. With a spring the car leaped from the kerb—no other word will describe the starting of that car. I suppose it must have been at least a hundred horse power. In a flash it was round the corner and gone. I climbed into my cab and made my humble way to Liverpool Street,

eventually reaching Wigborough, and taking up the daily round and the common task.

"Now what do you think of that chap, Bill? I think you will disapprove, because for all your wild-West adventures, San Francisco earthquakes, etc., you are a steady-going old girl and object to such rampaging persons as this Carville. But I have been thinking that after all, if one is an artist, everything in the world has a certain 'value.' I don't quite know how to explain what I really do feel, but anyhow men like Carville appear to me as vivid bits of *colour* in the composition of life. Taken by themselves they are all out of drawing, and too loud, but in the general arrangement they fit in perfectly. They inspire one's imagination too, don't you think? I shall never forget that chap's black rage, his blazing eyes, his hooked nose as he stood by the locked door. I wonder what the people next door thought, just getting into bed!

"This is a letter, eh! Well, I must dry up, or I shall never get to bed. If I see any more of my strange friend I'll let you know. Love to all at Netley as usual. When are you coming home to dear old rainy England?

"Yours ever,

"CECIL.

"P. S.—If you could get me some of those jolly little paper fans you sent me from Chinatown last Christmas, please do.

"CECIL."

CHAPTER IV

MISS FRAENKEL

I FOLDED up the thin crackling sheets of paper and handed them to Bill, who took them without comment, and for some time we sat rocking in the twilight, absorbed in our own thoughts.

It must not be imagined for a moment that we, and least of all I, an experienced and professional author, accepted this contribution to our investigations without reserve. A lengthy apprenticeship to life warned us that "things do not happen that way." But just for a few moments (and this was the cause of our silence) we revelled in the delicious sensation of having beheld in one of its most incredible gestures the long arm of coincidence. Swiftly we sketched out the story. Eagle-faced adventurer—marries his mistress—casts her off—leaves her penniless in New York—she blackmails him—he grants her an income—agent in New York takes charge of letters—yes, it hung together—it hung together, coincided!

Personally I was a little disappointed after the first flush of excitement. I thought it a little melodramatic and I abhor melodrama. I wanted something finer, something with a touch of great sentiment, something commensurate with the beauty and dignity of the woman's bodily frame, something that would explain and gild with delicate interest the expression of sombre and uncommunicative

melancholy that hung like a cloud over her face. I felt reluctant to delve further into a history that was footed upon so unsatisfactory a foundation as this enigmatic creature who had blazed suddenly upon the painter-cousin's vision, a mere spendthrift man of pleasure, inarticulate save in his startlingly decadent behaviour. After all, what had he done, this fine gentleman with an eagle face and iron will? Sold a few automobiles to the aristocracy. Pooh! In America he would pass as a hustling business man with unconventional ideas. In grey, feudal old London, no doubt, he appeared as a meteoric genius, a veritable Napoleon of salesmanship, a marvel. But here——!

"Well," I said, at length, "what do you think of it?"

Bill slipped out of her chair and prepared to go in and get the dinner ready. We dine at six.

"I think," said she, "that there is nothing in it. It's hardly likely that—well, is it?" she asked, vaguely.

"No," we agreed, "it isn't."

"Still," I added, "it is a most interesting commentary upon our own little problem. It only shows how indefinitely one might extend the ramifications of a trivial tale. Of course, the children believe implicitly in the statement that he is at sea. If that be a legend, it is clever. But then—it is impossible."

"It's not a common name," remarked Mac, filling his pipe.

"It's a very easily assumed one," I argued. "It's a name you can't argue about. It might be Irish,

French, Italian, Spanish or American. It tells you nothing."

Bill paused at the door.

"I don't suppose he had anything to do with giving the children those awful names," she suggested.

"Oh, as for that, I have known plenty of mothers who claim that right," I responded. "That does not amount to much. No. There are two points that seem to me to invalidate the claim of this gentleman to any connection with our neighbours, but that is not one of them."

"What are they?" inquired Mac. Bill opened the door and went in. I cleared my throat.

"First," I said, "there is the entirely fanciful argument that such a man as Cecil has described would not be attracted by such a woman as—Mrs. Carville. I can't explain in so many words why I think so, but I do. I don't believe she would attract him. If you consider a moment, you will see it. The English gentleman of good family and birth, when he has once broken out of his own social world, does not show much taste and discrimination in the choice of a wife or mistress."

"Well," said Mac.

"Second, we have the incontestable fact that Benvenuto Cellini, though sharing his illustrious brother's features and histrionic talent, has blue eyes and fair hair. Where did he get them?"

"Something in that," my friend admitted, throwing his match into the darkness. "We'll have to hunt round for a *tertium quid*, so to speak."

"You put it pithily," I asserted. "Personally I am coming to the conclusion that Cecil's story, while certainly interesting in itself, does not help us at all with our own difficulty. I am inclined to think that he is of our nation and fair complexion. Really, when you reflect, it is unjust to assume your *tertium quid* and complicate the story—yet. We have no actual evidence of her—obliquity."

"No," said Mac. "Let's wait."

"We must," I replied. "The children themselves will no doubt provide us with plenty of food for conjecture if they go on as they have begun. We are good friends now, they and I."

"You surpassed yourself as an Indian," he laughed.

"Hostile," I corrected. "Did you notice the realistic way in which Giuseppe Mazzini fell?" He nodded.

"You'll have to be a cow-boy to-morrow," he remarked. "You might suggest rounding up their confounded chickens and set them to repairing that fence."

"I shall be a cow-boy with enthusiasm," I said. "Under my breast beats an adventurous heart, believe me. As for the fence, I would rather not get into trouble by interfering with their affairs."

"She didn't seem any too friendly."

"Hostile would describe it better."

"Still, if you could get a word with her, it might elucidate the mystery?" "Yes," I said, as the gong tinkled within.

"Chop," said he, and we went in to dinner.

We had reached the cheese and celery before Bill contributed a piece of news that impressed us in different ways.

"I 'phoned Miss Fraenkel this morning," she said, "and asked her to come up after dinner this evening. She said she'd be tickled to death to come."

I said nothing at first, and Mac, annexing an unusually large piece of cheese, grinned.

"Say," he said, "suppose we get Miss Fraenkel's opinion of the chap with the hooked nose. She's American; she'll be sure to have an opinion."

"No doubt," I conceded. "We shall see whether we have not taken too much for granted. There's only one thing, and that is, are we not exposing Miss Fraenkel to temptation by exciting her curiosity yet more about her neighbour?"

"Oh, bunk!" said Mac. "Women don't have to be led into that sort of temptation. They take it in with their mother's milk."

"You cynical old devil!" exclaimed Bill, indignantly.

"Well, it's true," he defended himself stoutly. "I'll bet you a quarter Miss Fraenkel's already tried them and found them guilty."

"Of what?" demanded Bill.

"Oh, ask Miss Fraenkel," said he. "How should I know?"

"I think," I said, gently, "you are making a mistake. Consider! Miss Fraenkel is no doubt interested in her neighbours, like any other woman. But you make a big mistake if you imagine that

ordinary people, people who are not professionally concerned with human nature, are accustomed to draw conclusions and observe character, as—as we do, for example. I have always thought,” I went on, stirring my coffee, “that Jane Austen made this same mistake. She takes a small community, much like Netley, N.J., and suggests, by the conversation of the characters, that they are all as observant and as shrewd as herself. We feel it was not so. Nay, we *know* it was not so, for Jane’s genius in that direction was almost uncanny. Now there is, I am safe in saying, nothing uncanny about Miss Fraenkel.”

“She’s very nice!” said Bill, nodding blithely at me over her cup.

I am loth to give any colour to the suspicion that I am about to confuse my narrative with extraneous details; but I must confess that Bill’s laconic benison had for me a personal appeal. She was, I felt, entirely and generously right. She had not overstepped the mark at all. Miss Fraenkel *was* very nice, but—it has nothing to do with my story. It is a point of honour with me to put Miss Fraenkel in her place, if I may express it so without discourtesy, and that place is certainly modest and inconspicuous. Miss Fraenkel’s light was very clear and very bright, but illuminated only a small area. She wrote an admirable paper and read it clearly and impressively at the Women’s Club on “The Human Touch in Ostrovsky.” Indeed, for one who had read so little of Ostrovsky it was a most creditable piece of work. It was in her estimate of the

English character that she was, I venture to think, less successful, more narrow in fact. You see, she was naturally confused by two facts. In the first place the similarity of the English and American languages seemed to her to warrant a certain similitude between the two nations; and secondly, her intimacy with the English people was practically confined to us three, who had been in America nearly seven years, and who, in consequence, had shrouded our more salient insularities beneath a cloak of cosmopolitan aplomb. Neither our speech nor our outlook upon life could be taken as typical of our great and noble-hearted nation. Yet she did take us in that sense, with the result that in her conception of the United Kingdom it was a rather fantastic and clumsily-fashioned small-scale model of the United States.

We had first met her, not in New Jersey at all, but in New York. After the earthquake, which I have mentioned as lifting us and many others from more or less comfortable sockets in San Francisco and scattering us over the Union, we found it a matter of some difficulty to rise to our accustomed level in New York. It really seemed, what with the failure of inspiration and our lack of suitable introductions, that the mighty mill-stream of Manhattan would bear us away and fling us over the rocks to destruction before we could ever get our heads above the surface.

Of those first days in East 118th Street none of us are disposed to speak. We might have gone back to England—surely so dire a calamity, so

utter a personal ruin, justified a relinquishment of our purpose. But we had not gone anyway. We could not contemplate the solicitous sympathy of friends who disliked America, who had protested against our emigration in the first place. We did not dislike America, nor did we blame her for our misfortunes. Our friends, even the painter-cousin, could not understand that we did not dislike America. They were misled by our occasional and quite natural sighs for a sight of the quiet English landscape, and our joking remarks about the customs regulations. So we stayed and fought, with our backs to the not over-clean walls of 118th Street. It was slow progress from 118th to 18th Street and from there to a real flat in Lexington Avenue, where it so happened that Miss Fraenkel had, and still has, a married sister. Bill and the married sister became warm friends, discovering in each other a common dislike of pink, and it was she who introduced us formally; though in a casual way Miss Fraenkel and I met occasionally on the stairs. And so it came about that when we felt able to abandon Lexington Avenue, in favour of a purer air and water supply, Miss Fraenkel chanted the praises of her own Netley in the Garden State, and Bill, journeying thither to spy out the land, returned an hour late for dinner, and incoherent with horticultural details.

It will be seen that though undoubtedly competent to criticize Ostrovsky or Mrs. Carville *per se*, Miss Fraenkel's opinion of the painter-cousin's discovery would be interesting only for its novelty

and irrelevance. I did not express my conviction quite as frankly as this, since my friend, though in sympathy with his wife's matrimonial plans, could not forbear to indulge in a mild hazing at my expense. I contented myself with opening the piano and pushing him into the seat. It is our custom to have music after dinner.

Only those who have written verse professionally can realize the extent to which music acts as a solvent upon apparently insoluble difficulties of rhyme and sentiment. It had become a habit with me to leave any such problem of prosody to one side and take it up again only when my friend opened his piano. Having completed an opera some time before, I had at this time no such trouble, and so, as he broke abruptly into that prodigious composition, the Overture to *Tannhäuser*, I gave myself up to an unfettered consideration of the mystery of life and the complexity of our multitudinous contacts with one another. It is not enough, I reflected, to say that we make and pass. We make and remake, we pass and, pausing on the brink of oblivion, return to spoil our first fine careless raptures. We make and pass; but the early dawn of our making is reddened by the sunset of another's decline. We are agitated by the originality of our ideas, unaware that they are born simultaneously in a thousand minds, and are woven into the texture of our time-spirit in a thousand-times-repeated design. Von Roon, in Chelsea, used to say that "a man's mind was like a chamber papered with used postage stamps. Examine them separately

and they were of no value; they were merely cancelled symbols of forgotten messages. View them as a whole and they formed an interesting and confusing composition." Time, and our proximity to other cancelled symbols is no guarantee of interior understanding. The Great Decorator has arranged us without regard for our individual merits or past intrinsic values, we are but points of colour in his immense and arbitrary arrangement. I was following up this thought, when the brass Canterbury Pilgrim that serves us for a knocker was vigorously sounded, and I sprang to open the door to Miss Fraenkel.

She stepped briskly into the room, looked round and smiled.

"Three times," she declared as I assisted her to remove her jacket. "But I forgive you if you'll only play that won—derful thing again!"

In person Miss Fraenkel was of middle size, admirably proportioned and situated in tone on the borderland between the blonde and the brunette. By which I mean that her hair was brown, her eye a warm hazel, and her skin of a satiny pallor that formed an effective background for a delightful flush that suffused her piquant features whenever her enthusiasm was roused. And her enthusiasm was continually being roused. To us cold Britons the *abandon* with which she, in common with her countrywomen, gave herself up to the enjoyment of a picture, a book, a landscape, or for that matter of a person, was a most fascinating spectacle. American women strongly resemble champagne. At a certain age they are incom-

parably stimulating, but intimacy with them involves a sort of "headiness" that demands discretion; a nervous energy emanates from them that tends to relax the critical faculty. There is, moreover, a tendency to turgescence in their speech that leads the unwary into a false estimate of their intellectual range.

It was some time before the conversation could be guided round to the subject which we three at any rate had at heart. Explosive cries of delight over Mac's last etching, Bill's new waist and a Chinese print I had recently acquired, were a matter of course. In deference to an unuttered request we adjourned to the studio upstairs, for Miss Fraenkel had been from the first candidly attracted by the suggestion of bohemianism in our *menage*. It was not her romantic view of an artist's life, however, that distinguished her from any other young and romantic lady, but her frankness and eloquence in acknowledging it. "It must be grand," she had told me in Lexington Avenue, "to be a *grisette*." We had admitted that it must, but had been unable to share her regret that she had not been a man "so that she could see *everything*." She was very charming as she was.

Of course she knew of the painter-cousin and indeed, as soon as she could think of it, gave us the needed opening.

"I saw a letter with an English postmark for you," she observed, examining the bottom of a piece of china that rested near her shoulder. "Did you get it?"

"We want you to give us an opinion about it, Miss Fraenkel," said Bill, bringing out the letter and giving it to her. She accepted the packet in some uncertainty.

"I!" she said, "give an opinion? I don't get it, I'm afraid."

"Read it," said Bill.

And she did. We sat round her, as she sat on the broad flat box that Mac called a "throne," in a semicircle, and studied the varying expressions that crossed her face as her eyes travelled down the pages. It occurred to me after I had retired to my room that night, that an English girl of twenty-one would not have weathered the concentrated gaze of three strangers with such serenity of features. An observant and invisible critic might have imagined us to have been awaiting the decision of a young and charming Sibyl, so intently did we gaze and so neglectful was she of our regard. This apparent coldness was explained to me by Bill as a characteristic of the American woman. "They like to be admired," she told me. "And so they don't mind if you do stare at them."

Miss Fraenkel looked up with a smile of comprehension.

"What a perfectly lovely letter!" she exclaimed.

Bill took the sheets and thrust them into the envelope.

"He must be a very interesting man, don't you think?"

"Surely! Oh, I should give anything to see his home. You've described it to me, so I know all

about it. Gainsborough landscape, and red tiles on the cottages!" She clasped her hands.

"I mean the man my cousin met," said Bill, gently. "Carville."

"Oh, him!" Miss Fraenkel looked at each of us for an instant to catch some inkling of our behaviour.

"Same name as——" and Mac jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

Miss Fraenkel's face did not clear.

"We thought," I said heavily, "that this man in England, you know, might have——" I stopped, dismayed by her lack of appreciation. She seemed unable to grasp the simple links of our brilliant theory. We had omitted to calculate upon the indifference of the modern American temperament to names. A foul murder had been committed a short time back by a gambler named Fraenkel, yet she would have laughed at the suggestion that such a coincidence should cause her any annoyance.

"I don't get it," she said, smiling, and we saw plainly enough that she did not get it. We were crushed. I explained in more detail the reason for which we had ventured to connect the two stories. We could see her trying to understand.

"You mean—just as if it was a photo-play," she faltered.

It does not matter now, and I admit that this put me out of humour. And yet it was true. We were really no nearer an actual and *bona fide* solution of Mrs. Carville's story than if we had simply tried to make, as Miss Fraenkel said, a photo-play. The others laughed at my downcast countenance.

"Well," I said, "you said Miss Fraenkel had tried them and found them guilty, Mac."

"What I meant was, Miss Fraenkel had formed her own opinion of the business."

"Yes," she said, "I have."

"Now we shall hear something," chirped Bill.

"Listen," said Miss Fraenkel. "It's very likely an assumed name."

It was our turn to look bewildered.

"Yes?" said Bill. "What then?"

"And——" went on Miss Fraenkel, making little motions with her hands as though she were trying to catch something that eluded her grasp. "And——oh! he's being held for some game in New York. She's got away with it, you see."

Miss Fraenkel waited for this appalling development to sink into our minds. I don't think it was given to any of us at the moment to divine just what had happened to Miss Fraenkel. Even seven years in the country were not sufficient training in American psychology to realize it at once. We sat and looked at her, temporarily dazed by what we took to be a story built upon exclusive information. And she sat and looked at us, as pleased as a child at the success of her manoeuvre.

"Why," stammered Bill, blankly through her glasses, "how do you know?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Fraenkel. "I just made it up, same's you." And she included us all in a brilliant flash of her hazel eyes.

We changed the subject after that. In self-defence we changed the subject, for it was plain

that when it came to making photo-plays we held a very poor hand. Moreover, we saw that Miss Fraenkel did not and could not take our ponderous interest in Mrs. Carville seriously. To argue that she ought to was no better logic than to say that since she was crazy about Chinese prints, she ought to be friendly with the Chinese laundryman in Chestnut Street. We regarded the nations of Europe as repositories of splendid traditions, magnificent even in their decay. Miss Fraenkel regarded them as rag-baskets from which the American Eagle was picking a heterogeneous mass of rubbish, rubbish that might possibly, after much screening, become worthy of civic privilege.

The wisdom of our action was proved by Miss Fraenkel herself, for not only did she make no further mention of Mrs. Carville before she rose to go, but even when I remarked (I escorted her to her home) pointing to the great lantern in the Metropolitan Tower, twenty miles away, shining like a star above the horizon, "that light shines on many things that are hidden from us," she failed to apply the sententious reflection to her own story, merely looking at me with an appreciative smile. She had forgotten our discussion utterly, and I was quite sure that unless we mentioned it, she would not refer to it again.

CHAPTER V

HE COMES

IT was the evening of one of the most perfect days in an Indian summer of notable loveliness. In this refulgent weather, to quote Emerson, who knew well what he spoke of, "it was a luxury to draw the breath of life." Free equally from the enervating heat and insects of high summer, and the numbing rigour of the Eastern winter, the days passed in dignified procession, calm and temperate, roseate with the blazing foliage of autumn, and gay with geraniums and marigolds. On our modest pergola there still clung a few ruby-coloured grapes, though the leaves were scattered, and in the beds about our verandah blue cornflowers and yellow nasturtiums enamelled the untidy carpet of coarse grasses that were trying to choke them. Not far away, down by the Episcopal Church, men were playing tennis in flannels on the courts of yellow, hard-packed sand. The intense blue of an Italian sky lent a factitious transparency to the atmosphere, and the tiny irregular shadows that indicated the colossal architecture of New York seemed to float like bubbles in an azure bowl. Across the street, a vacant plot of land, neglected because of imperfect title, was cut diagonally by a footpath leading down to Broad Street, where, out of sight but not of hearing, trolley-cars between Newark and Paterson thundered at uncertain intervals.

It was our custom, as we sat on our verandah during these afternoons, to watch the gradual appearance of familiar figures upon this path. We knew that a few moments after the whistle of the five-twenty had sounded at the grade-crossing down in the valley, certain neighbours who commuted to New York would infallibly rise into view on this path. There was Eckhardt, who lived at five hundred and nine, and spent the day on the fourteenth floor of the Flatiron Building. There was Williams, immaculate of costume, who designed automobile bodies and had an office on Broadway. There was Wederslen, the art-critic of the *New York Daily News*, a man whom all three of us held in peculiar abhorrence because he persisted in ignoring Mac's etchings. There was Arber, rather short of stature and rather long of lip, an Irishman who, miraculous to state, admired Burns. There was Confield, an Indianian from Logansport, who had been to Europe on a vacation tour (*No. 67 Series C., Inclusive Fare \$450*) and invariably carried a grip plastered with hotel labels to prove it. We had met these men at tennis and at the Field Club, and in our English way esteemed them. They would come up, head-first, so to speak, out of the valley, revealing themselves step by step until they reached the street, when they would acknowledge our salutations by a lift of the hat and a wave of the evening paper, and pass on to their homes. They generally came, too, in the order in which I have given them. Eckhardt was always first, for he did not smoke, and the smoking-cars on the Erie Road were generally

behind. And Confield, of course, was likely to be last, for he had his bag.

It was so on the day of which I speak. The deep bay of the locomotive came up on the still autumn air, and a cloud of dazzling white vapour rose like a balloon above the trees and drifted slowly into thin curls and feathers against the blue sky. It was, even in this trifling detail, a homelike landscape, for Bill had told us how, from the square hall window of High Wigborough, you could see the white puffs of invisible trains on the lonely little loopline from Wivenhoe to Brightlingsea.

A few moments, and one by one, and in the case of Wederslen and Williams arm-in-arm, our neighbours hove into view out of the valley, saluted and passed. We noted the unusually friendly attitude of the two. What was Williams up to? we wondered. We knew that Williams, the ignoble designer of *tonneaux*, laboured under the delusion that he could paint. Of course he could not paint—we were all agreed upon that—but he had shown us various compositions done during vacation time—blood-red boulders and glass-green seas. Was it possible that he was convincing Wederslen that he could paint? We shuddered for Art as we thought of it. Their wives were not friendly, though, so Bill asserted. We placed our hopes for Art on that.

For some moments after they were gone, and Confield with his bag had passed from view down the forest path, we tried to contemplate with stoical indifference the prospect of seeing Williams

hailed by the servile and blandiloquent Wederslen as a genius. Had he not said of Hooker that "he was likely, at no distant date, to be seen in all the collections of note? His rare skill with the burin, his delicate feeling for nature——" and so on. Of course we all esteemed Hooker and were glad to see him make good; but really, as Bill remarked, "A man who said Hooker had a feeling for nature would say anything." It was like speaking of Antony Van Dyck's feeling for nature. Hooker's Dutch gardens and Italian ornamental waters, his cypresses like black spearheads, his eighteenth-century precisians with their flowered waistcoats and high insteps, were as far from nature as they could conveniently get. So much for Wederslen. We might have pursued the subject indefinitely had not our attention been drawn abruptly to the path.

He came uncertainly, this new figure, pausing when he was only half revealed, as though in doubt of his direction. He wore a Derby hat, and we saw over his arm a rubber mackintosh. Making up an obviously unsettled mind, he abjured the path and struck straight across towards us, with the evident intention of inquiring the way.

There are many conceits by which men may assert their individuality in dress, even in these days of stereotyped cut. They may adhere by habit or desire to the uniform of their class, they may preserve their anonymity even to a cuff-link, yet in some occult way we are apprised of their personal fancy; we see a last-remaining vestige

of that high courage that made their ancestors clothe themselves in original and astonishing vestments. And it is this fortuitous difference, this tiny leak, one might say, of their personality, that stamps them finally as belonging to an immense mediocrity. It is this subtle and microscopic change, a sixteenth of an inch in the height of a collar, a line in the pattern of a scarf, a hair's breadth in the disposition of a crease, that the psychologists of the market-place call distinction, and labour industriously to supply.

But the man who now crossed the street and stood before us bore neither in his apparel nor in his lineaments a single detail by which he could be remembered. In everything, from his black medium-toed boots to his Derby hat of untarnished respectability, from his recently-shaven chin to his steady grey-blue eyes, he betrayed not the slightest caprice which would enable an observer to distinguish him from a particular type. It was as though he had been conscious of all this and had even sought to avoid the most trivial peculiarities. In height, in feature, in dress, he was so ordinary that he became extraordinary. His intention to be unnoticed was so obvious that it predicated, in my own mind at least, a character and possibly an occupation out of the common run.

"Can you tell me," he began in a voice that gave no hint of emotion, "can you tell me if this is Van Diemen's Avenue?"

"Yes," we said all together, studying him the while. "Yes, this is Van Diemen's Avenue."

"Thanks," he replied, and withdrew his foot from our bottom step.

It seemed as though he was about to depart and leave us guessing, when he spoke again.

"Perhaps you know the house I want," he said. "Carville's the name. I," he added as if in an afterthought, "am Mr. Carville." And he looked at us gravely, apparently unaware of the turmoil of curiosity which he had aroused.

Some one—I think it was Mac—pointed to the next house.

"That's it," we managed to say.

For a moment his eyes rested upon it casually.

"Thanks," he said again, and then, "Much obliged." He stepped back to the sidewalk and walked along to the house. None of us can recall exactly what happened when he approached his door, for we were all looking away across the valley, hastily rearranging our chaotic impressions. It is to be presumed that he knocked and was admitted. When we glanced round a few moments later he was gone.

"Great Scott!" murmured Mac, and looked at us in the growing dusk. Bill rose to get dinner.

Throughout the meal we refrained from any comment. Now that he had materialized, there was no reason, in the nature of things, why we should bother our heads any more about him. In the most natural way he had appeared and innocently demolished the photo-play romances we had constructed about him. It was a warning to us to avoid nonsense, in future, when discussing

our neighbours. Miss Fraenkel had fared no better. Evidently he was not "held" for something with which his wife had "got away." We were all ridiculously wrong and ought to be ashamed of ourselves. And so we were; avoiding mention of him, and devoting our attention to the fish, for it was Friday, and we kept it religiously.

But as I drank my coffee and listened to that exquisitely mournful *barcarolle* from the *Tales of Hoffmann*, the whole episode took on a different aspect. I perceived, as Schopenhauer had perceived a hundred years before me, that our first judgment upon a man or principle is probably the most correct. I saw that I had been carried away by logic and numbers and had discounted my first impression. From the angle at which I now regarded Mr. Carville I could see that, after all, his case presented certain details which we could not as yet account for. Unfamiliar as I was with the life of the sea, I felt instinctively that men who had their business in great waters would bear upon their persons indications of their calling, some sign which would catch one's imagination and assist one to visualize their collective existence. But Mr. Carville had nothing. I passed in mental review the details of his appearance, his blue serge suit, his dark green tie, his greying moustache, clipped short in a fashion that might be American, English, French or German. His voice had been quiet and deferential, but by no means genteel; nor had it any hint of the roystering joviality of a sailor. More than anything else his gait, in its sedate unobtrusiveness, seemed to

me utterly at variance with the rolling swagger which we conventionally associate with seamen.

Grant, however, I said to myself, that he looks a truth-telling man. Grant that he is, as his children said, at sea. Surely there is something romantic in this quiet-eyed man being married to such a woman as Mrs. Carville! Surely a man whose children bear names so bright on the rolls of fame must have something in him worthy of admiration! As the *barcarolle* swelled and died away, I felt this conviction growing within me. I felt certain that so far from demolishing the real mystery, Mr. Carville had only brought it into focus. We had not seen it before. And it promised to be a mystery on a higher plane than the rather sordid affair we had been postulating.

I decided to sleep on my conclusions, however, before broaching the matter to my friends, and having some work to finish for the morning's mail, I went back to my desk. For three hours or so I worked steadily, page after page slipping to the floor as I finished them. My friends did not disturb me, and when I ascended to the studio for a "crack" before retiring, I found the big room in darkness. So! I mused and descended. A brilliant moon threw a dense black shadow in front of the house. The porch was in gloom, but the street was nearly as bright as day. I stood on the verandah for a few minutes, filling a pipe and looking across at the Metropolitan light where it shone serenely on the horizon. As I struck a match I became aware of a figure moving slowly in front

of the Carville house, up and down the gravel walk that ran below their verandah. I threw away my match and stepped down into the moonlight, intending to stroll up and down for a while on the flags of the sidewalk. I often find that if I retire immediately from a burst of writing I am unable to sleep for several hours. The pendulum of the mind should be brought to rest quietly and without shock.

I was not surprised when the figure in the shadow stepped out into the moonlight as I approached. What startled me was the undoubted resemblance to myself in figure and mass. We were both small men. Perhaps there was a shade more shoulder-breadth on his side than mine, but there was the same slight droop, the same negligible tendency to stoutness. As I turned the matter over in my mind we came face to face.

“Good evening,” we said simultaneously. He waved his pipe, a corn cob, towards the east. “New York!” he remarked, and we stood side by side for a moment in silence. The simple observation seemed to me to imply a susceptibility to the sublimity of the prospect that we had not discovered to any extent among our other neighbours. To them, apparently, New York was no more than London is to Hampstead; they had the suburban sentiment in an acute form. Nevertheless I was somewhat at a loss to continue our conversation. It seemed foolish to neglect such a heaven-directed opportunity to meet this man on his own ground and obtain some light upon his career. How should I begin? Should

I say to him, "Look here, it is very nice, no doubt; but we, your neighbours, are simply crazy to know who and what you are?" That might strike him in various ways. He might take offence, and one could not blame him. He might see humour in it, and a proof of the contemptible meanness of human nature. I decided that I lacked courage to blurt out my desire that way. He was so very much like myself that I could not rid myself of the notion that he might prefer a milder way of approach. And as I sorted out my stock of diplomacy he spoke of the matter himself.

"You are a seaman, I understand?" I remarked. He gave me a quick glance.

"I go to sea," he replied, "if that is what you mean. Yes, in the legal phrase of the Board of Trade, I'm a seaman, and my number is *Three nine five, eight nine three.*" He laughed shortly and continued to look out towards New York.

"A picturesque life," I hazarded, regretting my total ignorance of it. Again he looked at me and laughed.

"You think so?" he queried. "You think so?"

"I speak from book knowledge only," I said. "It is usually described in those terms." We began to walk to and fro.

"Well," he admitted unexpectedly, "and so it is. I don't doubt that to anyone just looking at it, you understand, it is as you say, 'picturesque.' But when you have a number like *Three nine five, eight nine three*, you have another view of it."

"You have been for a long voyage?"

"Oh no," he said; "Mediterranean and back, that's all."

I began to realize something of the man from this. I had no knowledge of the sea, but I certainly had a mind trained by years of observation and reflection to deduce certain definite data affecting human nature. And I realized dimly that a man who regarded a run round the Mediterranean and back across the Atlantic as a trivial episode scarcely worthy of mention, might have views on literature and art radically at variance with my own.

"I should have thought," I remarked, "that you would have made your home there rather than here."

"There's some who do," he said. "Lots of the Anchor Line men do. But personally I'd rather be here."

"It is very like England," I agreed, as he broke in.

"Sure," he said. "I was just thinking as I came up the hill. I come from Hertfordshire myself. Very like the Northern Heights."

"We always think," I answered, "that it is like Essex."

He pondered for a moment, enjoying his pipe.

"Well, it is," he decided. "You mean looking over Staten Island to the sea? Yes, only they're busier here than along Mersea Flats, eh? Oh yes, I used to know that part when I was a boy. There isn't much between Chipping Barnet and Hamford Water that I didn't know in those days."

"You will go back some day?" I said as we

turned. A change came over his face, and he put his hand to his chin.

"No," he said. "I'll never go back there. I'm here"—he waved his pipe—"for keeps."

I looked at him in astonishment.

"Why?" I said, a little indignantly. "Are you not an Englishman?"

For a moment he did not reply to the blunt question, but looked down at the flags. His feet were cased in red velvet slippers, I noticed, and they struck me as quite indescribably bizarre in the moonlight. His hesitation was too ominous, heavy with unimaginable complexities. His voice was muffled when he spoke.

"No," he said. "I'm—an alien."

At first I was impressed by the tone more than the words. It was mournful, with a streak of satisfaction in his condition that I felt was assumed.

"You mean," I said at last, "that you intend to take out papers?"

He looked at me queerly.

"How long would it take," he inquired with a smile, "to put in five years' residence, when I'm in the country about three days every two months? No, I don't think I'll bother about papers. When I say I'm here for keeps, I mean those belonging to me."

"There is a question I would like to ask you," I said, tentatively.

"I shall be very glad to answer it if I can," he replied.

"It refers to your little boys."

"Why," he broke in, "they haven't been annoying you, have they? I hope they haven't done that!"

"Not at all. I merely had a curiosity to know why they bear such unusual names."

He smiled.

"They told you their names, did they?"

"They were good enough to commend me for the way I played Indian," I explained, and he gave me another of his quick comprehensive glances.

"It's rather a long story you've asked for," he said.

"I am interested in stories," I put in.

"Beppo said you made pictures," he mused.

"In words," I added.

He paused again. It seemed to be a part of his mode of thinking, this occasional parenthesis of silence. It was almost as though the man were leading me down a vast and dimly-lit corridor, laying his hand at times on various doors, and then withdrawing it, from some mysterious motive, and continuing upon his way.

"An author?" he said, half to himself. "Ah!"

It was borne in upon me that neither a wide experience in common everyday psychology, nor even an exhaustive knowledge of sea-life could adequately cope with the bewildering emotions implicit in that "Ah!" In its way it was the most remarkable thing he had said.

"Yes, if you like," I replied. "I am professionally interested in stories."

He felt in his pocket for matches and as the

flame spurted before his face I saw the corners of his mouth betrayed a pucker of amusement. I suddenly felt the absurdity of my position. I had been led to expose myself to ridicule. I might have expected it after the behaviour of his children.

For a moment I was warm!

"You see," he said, looking at his watch, "it's this way. I'm not a very good hand at yarns, but if you like I'll step along to-morrow some time and have a talk. I don't go back to the ship till Sunday night."

"We shall be charmed," I said. "Come in to tea."

"All right," he answered. "I will. It must be nearly eight bells, I should think, twelve o'clock."

I pointed to the Metropolitan Light, glowing a deep red. He regarded it with interest.

"Think o' that!" he said, absently. "Just think o' that. Eight bells!" He roused himself. "Well, good-night to you, sir. I must turn in. I always sleep best in the Middle Watch."

And he laughed as though at some flash of memory and made his way into the darkened house.

CHAPTER VI

HE BEGINS HIS TALE

THE work upon which I had been engaged during the evening did not engross my mind that night when I retired. Over and over again I endeavoured to measure the distance I had advanced in knowledge of my neighbour since I stepped out into the moonlight. I wished to realize the exact advantage I would hold over Mac and Bill when we met next morning at breakfast. And that was just what I found myself unable to do. Both of my friends were shrewd enough to smile if I trotted out the startling information that he came from Hertfordshire. Of course, they would say, he must come from somewhere. And if I remarked he had been in the Mediterranean, they would fail to see anything amazing in a sailor having been in the Mediterranean. And then, how was I to convey to them the extraordinary impression he had made upon me by the simple statement that he was an alien? Why, they would exclaim, were not *we* aliens too? Were not fifty per cent of our acquaintances in the United States aliens? No, it was impossible. They would not understand. And if they would not understand that, how could they be expected to appreciate in all its puzzling simplicity his ejaculation: "An author? Ah!"

It occurred to me with some bitterness that a brutal editor in San Francisco had once complained

of my inability to interview people with any success. "God A'mighty! Why the h—l didn't you *ask*, man!" And to tell the truth, I am not designed by nature for the cut-throat business of interviewing. To stand before a stranger, note-book in hand, and pry into his personal record, always seems to me only a form of infamy midway between blackmail and burglary. There is to me something in any man's personality that is sacred, something before which there should be a veil, never to be drawn aside save in secret places. An effete whim, no doubt. At any rate it explained why I had enjoyed no success as an interviewer, why I had come away from Mr. Carville without extracting from him his age, his income, his position, the names of his employers, his ship, his tailor or his God. Nothing of all this I knew, so ineptly had I managed my chances to obtain it. And yet I felt that, even if I did not possess any concrete morsel of exciting news, I had discovered not only that he had a story, but that he was willing to tell it. And as I fell asleep a conviction came to me that whatever his story might be, however sordid or romantic, I would pass no judgment upon it until I perceived in its genuine significance, the chapter that lay behind that strange utterance, "An author? Ah!"

* * * * *

The next morning I slept late, until past seven in fact. It had ever been an axiom with us that the indolence attributed to the "artistic temperament" was a foolish tradition. Creative power

undoubtedly comes late in the day and in the still night-watches; often I had planned a whole book while in bed; but there are many things to do in literature and art besides creation—research, reading, preparing of palettes, writing of letters and so on, that can be better done early. So we breakfasted at half after seven as a rule. I managed to bathe and shave before Mac's *reveille* sounded on the piano.

As I opened my napkin I saw that Bill had something of importance to impart, and it came out at once.

"He's mending the fence!" she exclaimed, passing the toast.

"And going about it as though he knew what he was doing," added Mac.

I was glad of this discovery of theirs. It would enable me to introduce my own contribution modestly, yet with effect.

"I wonder," I said, "if he would approve of that tree being cut down." Mac stirred in his chair. The daily spectacle of those two little boys hacking slivers from the prostrate tree had been very trying to him.

"I judge not," he said with energy. "A man who——"

"I wish we knew the exact relations between them," I interrupted. "I mean, whether they quarrel at all."

"Of course they do," said Bill without thinking. "All married people do—at times."

Her husband looked down his nose into his egg. I smiled.

"True, since you say it," I replied, "but you must remember that just as no two people look exactly alike, so no two couples live on exactly the same terms. Just as——"

"Oh, what do you know about it?" said Bill. "Trust a bachelor to lay down the law."

"Those who look on—you know," I protested.

"That isn't true in regard to marriage," she retorted, "because unless you are married you *don't* look on at all, see?"

I saw.

"I am going to speak to him after breakfast," announced Mac. "He seems a very decent sort of chap. I wonder what he is at sea."

"I had quite a little chat with him last night," I began.

"You did!" they exclaimed. I nodded, enjoying their surprise.

"Yes," I said. "I found you were gone to bed when I finished, and so I went out on the flags for a short walk. He was out there doing the same thing."

"Go on!" said Bill.

"He didn't say anything about mending the fence," I remarked.

"Oh goodness! Tell us what he *did* say," she implored.

"Well, not much. He comes from Hertfordshire."

"He's English then! I thought so," said Mac, relieved.

"He said No," I answered. "That was one of

the most curious remarks he made. He said he was an alien."

"Did he, by Jove! So he is; but it's a very strange thing to say," said Mac. Bill regarded me with interest.

"He's going to keep us guessing," she remarked, dolefully.

"No," I said, taking another piece of toast. "He accepted my invitation to tea this afternoon, and he is going to tell us about himself."

After all I had overlooked my most telling item. I might have known that the fact of his visit would prove more thrilling than any gossip coming second-hand from me. They wished to speak with him again, this man who had come upon us so quietly yet so dramatically. We had all become sufficiently American to desire "a good look at him." And when Americans take a good look at you they go over you with a fine tooth comb. They see everything, from a knot in your bootlace to the gold-filling in your teeth. My friends "sat up" as I made my announcement. I felt that, in editorial parlance, I had made a scoop.

"Bully!" said Mac, and Bill, her chin on her hand, looked across at me with approval. After all, again, my lack of enterprise in interrogating Mr. Carville the night before was bearing fruit. It was crediting me with a sportsmanlike reluctance to steal a march on my friends. I had, unconsciously done what we English call "the right thing." I had invited him to tea. Suddenly Bill's eyes became anxious.

"Are they both coming?" she asked.

"I—I don't think so," I faltered. "I can't say exactly why, but I don't think so. You see," I went on, "the reason he offered to tell me about himself was a question of mine about his children. I said their names were curious enough to strike anyone. He said it was a long story. And he offered to step over himself. Now," I felt more certain of myself now, "the story of his children's names may take two directions. If *he* named them he will not want his wife to hear him tell about it. If *she* named them, which is not likely, why, he would scarcely take the trouble to come over and tell strangers about it, would he?"

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Bill.

"So am I," I agreed. "I think it is best to get acquainted with families on the instalment plan, don't you?"

"Rather!" said Bill, and held out her hand for my cup.

It was a perfect morning, clear and crisp, and the long sunlit vista of Van Diemen's Avenue tempted us sorely. We went through our daily struggle. Those people who work by rote, who are herded in offices and factories, and who are compelled by the laws of their industries to remain at their posts whether the sun shines or not, often regard the lives of free lances like us as merely agreeable holidays; they would certainly be somewhat staggered to find the enormous will-power involved in resisting the calls of the open road. There are so many subtle arguments in favour of

abandoning the desk for just once. "It is such a glorious day, it is a shame to be indoors," "one's head is muggy; a good walk will clear the ideas," or "it doesn't do to stick at it too long, you know: give it a rest." (This when you have not written a line for a week!) And so on. We knew them all, these specious lures to idleness, and strangled them with a firm hand each morning after breakfast. Well we knew that on a dark dismal rainy day we would hear the Tempter saying, "Who could work on a day like this? Leave it until the sun shines in the window. Try that interesting novel you brought home. After all, you know, you must read to see how the accepted masters do it. Read for technique . . . "

By nine o'clock we would all be at work.

So it was on this bright morning in October. I remember being rather struck with the excellence of the work of the preceding evening. It was not great work, you may say, not by any means in the category of immortal classics. It was not even signed, being an appreciation of a certain proprietary article in common use and extensively advertised. There was to me a quite indescribable humour in the fact that this essay in admiration was eventually published in French, German, Swedish and Polish, running into a six-figure issue, while my last novel, a sincere piece of literature, hung fire, so to speak, and never got beyond the publisher's preliminary forecast of a thousand copies. Was I not angry? Far from it. I was no puling undergraduate with a thin broad-margined book of

verse to sell. The public was at perfect liberty to buy what it pleased. If they wanted my work, the work I loved and toiled to make as perfect as possible, they would get it, all in good time. For the present I was content to wait and do the thing which could be translated into Swedish and Polish, into dollars cash. It is customary, I know, to rail at the American public, to accuse them of a material mania. An artist is better employed, in my humble view, in trying to understand them, for believe me, they are not so vile as the precious *littérateurs* and others would have us believe. Bitterness is no preparation for sympathetic study. And without sympathy our works, however clever and lovely, are but Dead Sea apples, crumbling to ashes at the touch of a human finger.

It must not be supposed that we had arrived at this way of thinking by a sudden leap. Again, far from it! My friend and I had been undergraduates, and very proud of ourselves into the bargain, long ago in England. But we had travelled since then, in more senses than one. We had known comfort and we had known the mute impressive numbness of despair. We had made "scoops" at times and celebrated them with joyous junketings. Once we had dined at Delmonico's, a meal of which the memory is still an absurd chaos. We had, moreover, confronted America with a blank wall of unyielding British prejudice. We had entrenched ourselves behind our conception of the thing to do and stupidly refused to do anything else. And we had been beaten to our knees. For it

meant eventually either submission or flight. And we never had any intention of flight. We had fixed it firmly in our minds that we would return triumphant to England, some day as yet far off. We were aliens, yes; but we meant to win through at last, to make our dream come true; our dream of a cottage, with honeysuckle and roses, "far from the madding crowd."

And so we realized at length that, after all, the country was there before us; that they had not asked us to come; that we might as well do things the way they wanted. All this was sound physic for us. It made us, in the true sense of the word, cosmopolitan, made us broad in culture and stimulated that deep human sympathy and understanding which lay at the root of that impatience with which we awaited the story of our neighbour.

I was typing a letter about three o'clock when I heard Mac's quick step on the stairs and the opening of the door. It is his custom to take advantage of his view of the path from the studio window to forestall the postman, and I took no further notice until I heard the hum of conversation. And so I was the last to appear.

He was standing in the middle of our room, his back to me, his Derby hat in his hand, looking curiously about the walls. I saw his glance held for a moment by the old English clock with its swinging pendulum and weights. It passed on to the chimney-piece loaded with antique silver, bizarre brasses, candle-snuffers and snuff-boxes. It moved over to the bust of Bill that Von Roon had given

her when she was married, a miracle of cunningly-arranged shadows. It fell away from water colour and etching without hint of ulterior interest, and came to rest upon the book-shelves. There was more than politeness in his glance at the books, more than mere curiosity. There was, plainly enough, connoisseurship. In the flicker of an eyelid you can tell it. He turned to meet me as I entered the room.

"I'm glad you've come," I said, shaking hands. His clasp was firm, almost athletic. "We tea at four, but I don't think I told you that."

"No," he said, "you didn't. I always have tea at three and it didn't occur to me that the custom might be different."

"Don't apologize," said Bill. "It only takes a minute to make. Do you like it strong?"

He smiled.

"It's the only way I get it, at sea," he said. "Strong! Boiled would be a better word for it."

"*We* like it strong," said Mac. "Sit down please. Here, I'll take your hat."

He sank back in a chair and looked about him. For the first time we saw him without a hat. A wide head, full over the temples, and with thinning hair on the brow, it was in no wise unusual. The head of a professional man, shall I say? His hands lay palm downward on the arms of the chair, the knuckles white, the broad flat nails imperfectly manicured.

"You've got a snug little place here," he remarked. "A very snug little place. It's very old

fashioned. I got quite a start when I stepped into—into the room from the street. Like the cottages in England. Art curtains, too!”

The tea came in then, and Bill offered him a cup. I think I was a little disappointed in his remarks. They were like his first impression on me the day before, so commonplace, so laboriously undistinguished that again the conviction was forced upon me that it was a pose. Had I expected too much? Was he merely a self-satisfied egoist, clever enough to perceive our interest and impose upon it? Bill endeavoured to clear the air. The mention of “art curtains” always made Mac restive.

“Do you like pictures?” she asked.

He gave her one of his quick glances.

“Some,” he replied. “I believe, if I’d been taught, that I could have done something in that line,” and he pointed with his saucer towards a water-colour, a drawing of the Golden Gate from Russian Hill.

I hardly knew what to make of this new development. I really did not believe he had looked at it. Moreover the drawing was not clamant with noisy daubs to attract the attention. It was not even recognizable as a view of the Golden Gate. It was a study of colour-combination, in an unusually high key, of interest to artists, but not to the public. Only the *cognoscenti* had remarked that picture before.

“You like it?” I said, taking it down and handing it to him.

“Ah!” he said, setting his cup and saucer on the

floor. "Yes, that's it, that's it." He studied it. "That's what I should have liked to tackle. Sugar-plums, eh?"

We looked at him in astonishment, and he assumed an attitude of apology.

"I beg pardon," he said. "What I meant was it reminded me of old Turner, you know, messing about with coloured sugar-plums."

"A colour-scheme?" said Mac, light dawning in his puzzled face.

"That's it, that's the word: colour-scheme," said Mr. Carville. "I'd forgotten the word." And he handed the drawing back. "You wonder at a seafaring man coming out here to live?"

"It's a very healthy district," I suggested.

"Mrs. Carville don't like New York, that's all," he said, simply. "Personally, I shouldn't have bothered. But she's quite right."

"I should think it was better for the children too," said Bill.

He nodded vigorously, packing the tobacco into his pipe.

"Fresh air," said Mac, who slept out on the porch half the year.

"Oh there's plenty of fresh air in Atlantic Avenue," he said. "I had something else in mind." He looked thoughtful, and then his face lighted up with an extremely vivid indignation. It died away again in a moment, but it transfigured him. "Automobiles," he added.

We nodded, understanding him perfectly. We had seen them, in New York as in Brooklyn, career-

ing at maniacal speed among the children at play. Bill, who loved children almost as much as flowers, had come in one day in Lexington Avenue, white and sick, and told us brokenly of something she had seen. So we nodded and he, seeing that we understood, said no more.

"Have you lived in America long?" I inquired.

"Both the kids were born here," he replied. "Yes, that's nearly eight years since we came. You see—but it's a long story. I don't know whether you'd be interested——"

Bill rose.

"Let us go outside," she said. "It's beautifully warm."

We went out.

"You must take the Fourth Chair," said Bill, looking at us.

We explained to him the legend of the Fourth Chair.

"You see," I added, "we were expecting you. There is fate in this."

For a long time he sat quietly looking across the valley, as though pondering something.

"I think I might as well begin at the beginning," he said at last, "and work up to the kids' names gradually. Though as a matter of fact I could tell you in two words the reasons for giving them such un-English names, it wouldn't explain how I feel. And that I take it is what you are after?"

"Begin at the beginning," I said.

"So I will. I told you I was born at sea. My father was a merchant skipper of Boston. I don't

remember him very well, for he died when I was seven, but I have a vague sort of an idea that he was a big man with big dark eyes and a great nose like the beak of a bird. *He* had run away to sea when—well, Napoleon was Emperor of the French when he ran away to sea. Sailors had pigtails and all the rest of it. His brothers did the same. At one time, in the 'sixties, there were six skippers ploughing the ocean, all Carvilles, all big black-whiskered men. You may hear of them yet in the ports out East.

“My father married four times. There was one peculiarity, or fatality if you like, about the Carvilles, and that was their failure to beget sons. Daughters came right along all the time. I have fourteen cousins, all married, and all got boys! The first three wives my father had only produced two daughters, who died before their mothers. You can understand that those six big men took it badly there were no sons. When the third wife died, childless, my father had given up the sea for a while and had invested in a ship-yard at St. John, New Brunswick. It was there that he met my mother.

“I can't go into details I never knew, so all I can say is that my mother was French Canadian. They had a big farm away up the Petitcodiac River and the girls used to come down to St. John to finish an education that began in Moncton and really ended, in my mother's case, in London, England.

“They built ships in those days in St. John, and some of the best were my father's work. As I said,

I don't remember him very well, but you will understand how I felt when one day, about nine years ago, we put into a little Spanish port for coal, and they made us fast to an old wooden hulk in the harbour. As we came round her stern I was leaning over the side and I saw the brass letters still on her square counter, *Eastern Star, St. John, New Brunswick*. That was one of my father's finest models. Pitch pine he made her of, and she's beautiful yet, for all her disgrace. I climbed aboard of her while the Corcubion women were trotting to and fro with the coal baskets, and looked round the poop. There was the cuddy as good as ever, teak frames, maple panels, pine flooring. That old hulk brought my old father before me as no daguerreotype could do. There was his name cut on the beam, *John Carville*. It may seem absurd to you people, but do you know, I realized then, as I looked up and saw my father's name on that beam, nearly smothered with countless coats of varnish, I realized how a young man of family feels, a Cecil, say, a Talbot or a Churchill, when he sees his ancestors' names in the history books. My father had done something, he was something. I don't know anyone who can better that title: a builder of ships.

"And my father did more than that, he sailed them and owned them. So far he had been under the Union flag, but this time, when he married my mother, and his finest masterpiece, the *Erin's Isle*, was anchored in St. John Harbour ready for sea, the Red Ensign was flying at the gaff."

"Did your mother go too?" asked Bill.

"Surely! you think that strange? Well, it was that or a life away at the back of everything; life on a farm, with a visit once a year to St. John. You like the country, don't you? Yes, but if you'd been down in the back-woods, if you'd lived in the thrifty way French Canadians have picked up from the Nova Scotians, and *improved*, if you were young and wanted to see something, you'd risk your soul to get away from it. You think a woman would have an awful life at sea. My mother jumped at it. She married a man who was sailing as skipper before she was born, and jumped at it! Taking everything into consideration, I don't blame her. You see, she had ambition, my mother had. Her education had been good enough, and she wanted to find a sphere where she could use it."

"And so she went to sea?" said Bill in gentle sarcasm. Bill's aversion to the sea amounts almost to malevolence. She is a bad sailor.

"For the time being, and to see the world," said Mr. Carville. "She had seen nothing, remember. Well, she saw it. They were away five years. You can imagine my father's feelings when the first child was a girl. She was born off the Ladrone Islands in the Pacific on the way to Hong Kong. I suppose he got over the disappointment somehow, for I never heard my mother say anything about quarrels except on the subject of living ashore. I told you my mother had ambitions. She wanted to live in England and have an establishment. But my father couldn't see the use. If she wanted to live ashore, he argued, why couldn't

she live in Hong Kong or Bombay or Colombo until he was ready to retire? She would see him just as often. No, she had no intention of doing that. She saw exactly how much ice a skipper's wife cut in a community of skippers' wives. She was after higher game. She settled it finally that if she couldn't live in London, she'd stay aboard the ship all her life.

"She got her way, but not all at once. One voyage she left the ship in Bombay and travelled across India, rejoining at Calcutta. Then she lived in Antwerp a good while, but got sick of it and shipped again when the ship sailed for Callao. That was the last of her voyages, my mother's I mean. For all I know the *Erin's Isle* swims yet. My sister was drowned and I was born before she dropped her anchor in London River.

"Drowned!" said Bill; "a little baby?"

"Going ashore in Callao," said Mr. Carville, turning to her, "there was a 'roller' started. I believe it's caused by the sea-bed shifting; slight earthquake in fact. The roller was a big wave and struck the ship's boat as they were rowing across the harbour. Accidents will happen, no matter how careful you are."

"Yes," we said quietly, "they will."

"They went from Callao to Brisbane and loaded again in Melbourne for home. My mother used to say she thought they would *never* get round the Cape of Good Hope. My father had done the voyage once in sixty-two days, almost a record; but this time everything went dead wrong. They

were driven as far as the Crozets, somewhere down near the South Pole, I believe. The grub gave out, and even my mother had to eat bread from corn that was ground in the coffee mill. The crew got restless and sulky. I've often tried to imagine it, the Skipper and his two mates, talking it over in the cuddy, keeping the men working to stop their thinking, running for days under reefed courses and double reefed topsails. And all the time with something else on his mind, something that materialized finally, into *me!*

"My mother told me that my father nearly went crazy with joy when I was born one Sunday morning, 18 south, 21 west, at seven bells on the star-board watch. They were in the trade then, spanking along almost due north for Fernando Noronha. It was rum for all hands that morning, almost the only soft thing left on the ship, and a little tea. The tea came in handy for their pipes, my mother told me. Poor chaps! They were dying for a smoke. Well, I have always got a good deal of satisfaction from knowing everybody was glad I came into the world. My father was dancing mad to get home and tell all the folks that the curse was lifted. He promised my mother anything; a home in London was one thing. He said he would quit the sea, for another. And he kept his word too. He was going on fifty-five, and had been at sea for thirty-eight years. Think of that! I've been at it for fifteen years now, and it seems an infernally long time. Thirty-eight years!

"So they settled in England. I don't know whether

you people can see it plainly, but if you think a little you will realize how strange those two felt in London, with their Saratoga trunks, their sea habits and their American prejudices. Can you?"

He looked from one to the other as we sat there, our chairs twisted a little so that we could see his face. The question was a shrewd one. I remember wondering if he was aware how vividly it brought back to our minds our first few weeks in San Francisco, our mistakes, our petulant anger with strange habits, our feeling of awful homesickness. Again we nodded silently.

"For a time they were up against it, you would say," he went on, "and they didn't dare to move away from their lodgings in the East India Dock Road. It was natural for my father to think he ought to live near the ships. The custom of living in the suburbs, commuting as they call it here, hadn't begun in the seventies. It was my mother who fired his ambition to live further out. It would have been all right and everything might have been different if his ambition hadn't been fired in another direction at the same time.

"My father had done well on the whole. He had saved for years and kept his money in banks or in ships, which he understood. But now, when the *Erin's Isle* was sold and he found himself worth about fifty thousand dollars, he began to invest in all sorts of queer ventures. He wanted to double his fortune before he died. Others had done it, men he met in Leadenhall Street and on the Baltic; why shouldn't he? You see, he had got hold of the

masculine part of my mother's ambition all right. She wanted to have an establishment, like a lady; he wanted to found a family in England. The money he was to make was for me. I was, he had settled, to be an engineer. He saw, that with steel coming in, engineering was to be the great goldmine of the future. So he would provide the capital by which I was to build up a huge fortune. The Carvilles were to be big people, understand; '*my son was to be Prime Minister some day.*' Humph!"

There was no bitterness in the exclamation, only a veiled irony, a detached amusement, at this memory of a dead ambition. We did not interrupt.

"They moved out just a little way, to Mildmay Park. You must remember that my father had no friends outside of business friends, and he had no idea that he would gain anything by moving west. My mother disliked what she saw of Kensington and Bayswater, and they thought in their simplicity that places with names like Mildmay Park, Finsbury Park, and finally Oakleigh Park, were good enough to begin on. Each move was a little further out, a little bigger house and a little higher rent until at Oakleigh Park, when I was six years old, it was a big semi-detached villa, with a garden and tennis-lawn and professional people for neighbours. That year my brother was born and my father began to die.

"You will laugh, I suppose, at the folly of it, but in her own way, my mother was setting up to be a fine lady. We had a cook and housemaid, and a nurse for me, and fine things I learned from her!

We had a hired landau on Saturday afternoon to go drives in, a pew in the church, and sometimes people to dinner. She even got my father to send to Dublin to find out the Carville ancestry and coat-of-arms. She did, that's a fact! So you see, she understood perfectly what was meant in England by keeping up a position. As I said, if my father had not got a sort of mania for turning his money over, the scheme might have gone through.

"He began to die when I was not quite six, and he went on dying and at the same time investing money until I was nearly eight. Imagine it! A great big man, as irritable as a child, slowly rotting away inside with cancer and two helpless little children, one a baby. All the time it was doctor after doctor, each one recommending a different cure; all the time it was investment after investment, the estate getting more and more entangled. He went to Baden one autumn and came home worse. He tried Harrogate in the spring, but it was no use. He came back, went to bed and never rose from it. Mind you, all the time the cancer was eating his body, this other cancer was at his mind. He plunged into the craziest schemes for getting twenty per cent. interest. Nothing my mother could say was able to make him see the madness of it. She wanted him to buy land, but he said no one but a fool would buy land unless they had a fortune to keep it up. At last, one January, it was over and done with. He died, and we had a grand funeral, and the real business of life began for us.

“For me it took a shape that I never got used to for all the years I was kept at it—school. For the life of me I can’t see what use it was to me or to anyone else. What does a child learn at school that’s of any use to him? You’ll think I am talking like an ignorant fool, I dare say, but hear me out. Between eight and seventeen I went to six different schools. The country in those days was spotted with them. Some were called colleges, some academies, one was called an ‘Ecole’ of something or other. Each one I went to had a different badge, a different coloured tassel, a different set of rules and subjects. Barring the last one, which was down in Essex, near Maldon, they were simply swindles. A mile from our house was a board-school, but it would not have been keeping up our position to send me there. I learned to read and write, but, Great God! curiosity will make a child do that. If he isn’t curious to learn what’s the use of him learning? He just forgets it, as I forgot it, as you did too very likely, forgot it and learned it again when you needed to. A child ought to be outdoors learning the names of flowers and trees and birds. I know what I’m talking about, mind! You may fancy that if a boy is going into the professions as I was to go, as I did go, he ought to be schooled. Well, when I entered my profession at seventeen, I had to begin at the bottom for all my schooling. I know as much of ‘professions’ as most men, and I say of schools, I have no faith in them. The men who teach them know nothing. They’re frauds and they know it. All that these schools did for me

was to teach me the importance of keeping up a position.

“Twenty per cent! Twenty per cent! The madness of it! The holes and corners he had rushed into, in his frantic hunt for twenty per cent! A bank in Australia, a railroad in Ecuador, a sailing ship that never by any chance sailed into prosperity, a ginger-beer works in Denmark, a cement works in Spain, a foolish concern which proposed to earn vast sums by buying moribund bad debts, a drydock in Japan, and a lunatic-scheme for shoeing horses without nails! This last invention, if I remember rightly, was to fasten them with steel suspenders and a kind of cuff-button over the pastern! And we couldn’t even leave the infernal things to die of inanition. Not content with paying no dividend, their familiar demons used to wake up and demand more capital. Calls! I would come home from school for my vacation and find my mother nearly crazy over another call. We were so simple that at first we paid them, and my father’s old ‘business friends’ (he hadn’t any others that I ever heard of) saw no objection. Humph! When I read in novels how a father’s friends help the hero and heroine, succouring the widow and the fatherless, I must smile. I recall the days of our storm and stress, when those sleek and slippery wolves, the ‘business friends’ of my father, sat round waiting for my poor distracted, gallant-hearted mother to stumble and stagger in her struggle with those wild-cats of investments. Wild cats! Bengal tigers were a better name for them! But she didn’t! She

won out and defied the whole caboodle, as she called them when she was roused. She won out, or I shouldn't be here now, maybe. She was a mother fighting for her offspring, and many a shrewd knock they had from her. And the 'business friends' slunk away and we've never seen them since. They talk about the romance of big business. What about the tragedy of the small business? What about the dark and dirty meannesses of business? What about the 'business friend,' watching, watching for the weaker ones to fall? What sort of romance is there in battles between wolves and women, in wars without chivalry? Mercy? Consideration for the weak and helpless? Knightly courtesy towards women? You won't find any of them in business, I'm afraid. I remember often sitting in the room with my book, a school-boy on his holidays, while some smug specimen of the business-friend variety sat explaining and domineering over my mother, who did her best to understand. Perhaps she was difficult and stupid. It isn't every woman—or man either—who can keep a grasp on the details of banks and railroads and cement and ginger-beer and marine insurance and company-law and all the other tarradiddles that were going to yield twenty per cent and didn't yield twenty cents! I used to wonder if these men's own wives would be as intelligent as my mother in similar circumstances. Humph! I *saw* those ladies in one or two instances when they were widowed and had to face the world without a man. I was astounded. To see those proud big-bosomed women, with their

red faces and narrow hearts and silly conversation, collapse and go down in ruin before the blasts of adversity! To see them, who had tried in their patronizing way to get us to give up our home and go into apartments, selling up and letting apartments themselves! Them! They hadn't a tenth of the fight in them my little colonial mother had, for all their big bosoms and tall brag about their independence and the fine offers they had when they were single. Some of the men too were in misfortune after a while. Some disaster sent up a big wave which washed them off their little rafts. I used to wonder what became of them. One I know died of heart-trouble. He was never troubled with his heart when he sat in our parlour laying down the law to a harassed widow and trying to get her money into his own rotten little business. Oh, it used to make my heart burn within me; but what could I do? All very fine for boys in novels to make vows to get the fortune back. Humph! You might as well try to get butter off a dog's tongue, or capture the steam from the kettle. Its *gone!* Besides, I always had a dumb dislike of business. I used to moon. We were so troubled with business-troubles we had no time to live. We never really got to know each other. I used to think my mother was hard and unsympathetic because her view of life wasn't mine—as if it could be. It was a miserable tangle. There was my father, whose love for us made him leave us that horrible legacy of investments. And my mother was so busy providing for us she had no leisure to love us. And my brother

and I were so different in temper and age and inclination we simply ignored each other. Love? It's easy to talk; but think of the innumerable gradations of it! Think of how incompetent most of us are to express it! I used to hear the servants use the word, and I would wonder. I used to read stories about it, and wonder still more. Little Lord Fauntleroy . . . Humph!

"Somehow or other, my mother did eventually get things straight. There wasn't much to bring up a future Prime Minister on, and besides, there was my brother. He took more after my father than I did. I was mother's boy, but he was a dark daring little devil without much respect for either of us. I don't know quite how it began, but between us there grew a feeling that can't be called brotherly love. Perhaps he realized that, according to my mother's ideas of founding a family, I was to be first and he was to be—nowhere. As it happened this was not just. He was clever from the very first. I was to be an engineer, and he was to do—well, anything that came along. But he had the talent for engineering; I hadn't. I liked it, same as any boy does, but while I couldn't do a simple division sum without making a mess of it, he could do it in his head, and standing on his head for that matter. Whatever he tried, that he could do, whereas my range has always been quiet and limited. I liked reading. He never seemed to be in the house long enough to read anything, but he knew more than I did. He does now."

"Where is he now?" I asked. He laughed.

“That’s more than I can say. I’ll get to that presently. What I want you to understand is the feeling we brothers had for each other. He didn’t detest me, you know. He didn’t take the trouble to do that. He simply laughed at me. He made friends with board-school boys and even errand-boys. One day my mother saw him out in the baker’s cart driving it round the neighbourhood. It was a sore humiliation for her, I’m afraid. He didn’t care. There were girls, too, even when he was only ten or eleven. Humph!

“All this time I was growing up in this sort of life, the life of the professional classes. When I left school, at seventeen, neither my mother nor I had much idea of the way a young gentleman became an engineer. She had no relatives in England, my father’s brothers were either at sea or dead, and my father’s business friends dropped away when he died, a way business friends have, I’ve noticed since. We were aliens still as far as real friends went. And then one day we saw an interview in a paper called the *Young Pilgrim*, one of those mushy papers for young people that do a lot of harm, in my opinion. It was an interview with Sir Gregory Gotch, the great engineer. My mother, who had a good deal of practical enterprise, decided to write to him and ask him. I’ve often wondered what he thought of that letter. It ran something like this: *Mrs. Carville presents her compliments to Sir Gregory Gotch, and would be obliged to him if he would inform her of the best way to article her son (aged seventeen) to the engineering profession in a manner*

suitable to his position. Something like that. You can understand from that that my mother had grasped the principle of gentility all right. It went down, too, for in a few days we had an answer, in which the great man gave the names of three or four firms in London that he recommended as reliable and old-established. We selected one, and apparently Sir Gregory's name was an open sesame there, for we had an invitation to go into the city and see them at once.

"We went, the gentlemanly youth and his lady-like mother, and saw the heads of the firm. We discovered then, that there were two ways of learning engineering, an easy way and a hard way. People say there's no royal road to learning. Like most proverbs, it's a lie. There's always a royal road, if you happen to be king of enough money. I might be an ordinary apprentice or a special pupil. If I was apprenticed I should have to start at six o'clock in the morning and work just like the men. I would stay in one shop for seven years and be turned out an expert mechanic. And I would have to wait six months for an opening, as they were full-up. If I came as a pupil, however, I would be allowed to spend so much time in each shop, including the offices; I could start at nine o'clock in the morning and finish the whole business in three years. The premium was nine hundred dollars, and I could start that minute. They didn't seem to care how soon they got that nine hundred dollars.

"We talked it over in the train. Of course, I was

all for the royal road and had plenty of good arguments in favour of it. What I want you to notice is that my mother was in favour of it, too! Think of it. She had been brought up in a hard school. She knew what it was to live sparingly and how useful early discipline was. She had told me often that all great men had a hard struggle. Therefore, how could I be a great man if I didn't have a hard struggle? And yet she was so obsessed with this notion of gentility that she deliberately gave me a soft time. She paid out three hundred dollars every year for three years . . .

"That time was what you might call a comedy of errors. I am not going to admit that I idled, for it is not true. I was ambitious. Since I was to be an engineer I went at it bald-headed. I went to polytechnics and night-schools, I spent whole nights in study, and did everything that any young chap could do. The whole of my efforts did not amount to a row of rivets. Why? I was up against the gentility again. I met the professional classes face to face.

"There were three other chaps there as pupils, and it so happened that they were every one from the great public schools. One was from Haileybury, one from Eton, and another from Winchester. When they found I was not one of them they ragged me, of course, which was good and proper. I often think the ragging in public schools is one of the few useful things they do there. When these men found I intended to study my profession they thought I was stark mad. They were all nice

young fellows and had money coming to them. Why should they bother? They thought I ought to look at it in the same light. Eventually I did. It was three to one. I found out that any amount of study and genuine merit would not carry me along in a profession. It was all well enough to be an engineer; but the main thing was to be a gentleman. Gradually I dropped the study, took afternoons off to go down west and began to worry my mother for more money.

"So it went on for the three years, my mother patiently waiting for me to get through my time and start in earnest as a professional man. My brother was at school, the one near Maldon, and was giving her a lot of trouble. I only saw him during the vacations. He was a big fellow, while as you see, I'm rather on the small side. I don't know that that should cause anybody any amusement! But because I was twenty and he was thirteen and nearly as tall as I was, he was for ever laughing. It seemed to him a huge joke. And as I thought about it the idea came to me that even nature was on his side and against me. It almost seemed as though she'd not only given him the brains, but the stature to be the great man my father and mother longed for. He was good-looking too, I remember, even then. My mother had to pack off a servant that vacation, a silly giggling little girl.

"I couldn't very well say anything to him, because I was getting into hot water myself for spending money. And when he wrote in mid-term for an

extra sovereign, my mother blamed me for setting him a bad example. Lord! I didn't have a sovereign a year when I was thirteen. Times had changed.

"I had been drifting along for some time, expecting when my time was up to be put on the staff, as was usual with pupils. They usually gave us a job until we could use our influence to get an appointment somewhere. But in my case it didn't happen so. The day my three years' term was up, a beautiful spring day, the junior partner informed me that I could consider myself finished, and handed me a reference that, for all the use it was, might have gone into the waste-paper basket then and there.

"I was staggered. I had no idea of how to get a job. Why had I been pushed out? Simply because the firm had found out I had no influence with Sir Gregory Gotch, no standing socially at all. I was an alien in their ranks. I went out of that office with all the externals of a gentleman and a public-school boy, but inwardly an outsider as you may say. One thing I had though, and that was the firm conviction that 'pull' and not merit counted. I had to get some one to 'influence' a job in my favour. It would not have been gentlemanly to answer an advertisement!

"My mother thought at once of one of my uncles, who had retired from the sea and was now a marine superintendent in Fenchurch Street. I called to see him; but he was abroad attending to a damaged ship. I think it was a month before I happened

to meet the Winchester boy who had been in the works with me. Quite by accident it was. Let me see now——”

Mr. Carville paused again, and leaning over to one of the geranium tubs knocked his pipe out. Suddenly he laughed.

“Why,” he said, “I’m telling you the whole story.”

“That’s what we want you to do,” I said, and the others nodded.

“The trouble is, you know,” went on Mr. Carville, “one thing leads to another. You can’t understand what I am without knowing how my brother and I came to be so—antagonistic. And to explain that it’s necessary to show you how I grew up in this professional, easy-going, snobby atmosphere and took it all in, while he, my brother, cut out his own course and went his own way in defiance of everything. I remember now! I saw that Winchester chap—his father was a wine-merchant and Master of the Tinkers’ Company—at Lord’s. I had nothing to do, and instead of hunting round to get a job, I went to Lord’s to see the cricket. There was old Belvoir clumping away at the nets. Engineering! Pooh! He had eight hundred a year his aunt left him—catch him practising as an engineer. He was going on a tour of all the Mediterranean watering-places with an M.C.C. team. Well, we had lunch in the pavilion, and I mentioned in a jolly sort of way that I’d been jounced out of the office. He said it was ‘a bally shame.’ Oh, I did envy that chap his eight hundred a year! Life

seemed to him one grand, sweet song. Cricket, Riviera, dances, clubs, country houses, everything. He was fenced in on every side, safe from the vulgarity of the world. He was hall-marked—a public-school man. He was a citizen of his world, I was an alien. He was rich. I had not even a savings-bank book.

“I was going away after the match when I discovered he had been thinking about me. That was Belvoir all over. He was a gentleman, and a gentleman to my mind is like an artist in one thing only, he is born—and then made. That was Belvoir. He had privileges as an English gentleman, but he had also duties. We had been together in the shop as pupils; that gave me a claim on him. He said he had an uncle in Yorkshire who was chairman of an engineering firm, and he would write to him. More than that, he did write and I got an appointment in their London office in Victoria Street. Good old Belvoir! Remember Spion Kop? That was the last of Belvoir. Lord’s, Riviera, clubs—Spion Kop . . .

“I settled down into that berth in Victoria Street as a cat settles into a cushion. I was warm, comfortable, well-paid, well-dressed and had all I wanted in reason. I lived at home and commuted to the city every day, travelling first class, living first class. I settled down. I was on the way to what my mother and father had in view, a comfortable position.

“My brother was at school, of course, down near Maldon. I never really got hold of my mother’s private opinion of her second son. It was a mys-

tery to me why she gave him so much pocket-money. I came to the conclusion afterwards that since she considered it her duty to give me a good start and put by all she could for my capital in business, there would be very little later on for my brother, so she was giving him tips now instead. She was able to say, 'I never stinted you at school, Francis.' It might have been better for him if she had. And yet, I don't know. I've come to think that men like my brother go their own road anyhow. Their hereditary nature is so strong that environment makes no difference, you might say.

"The main difference between us, when I was twenty-two and he was fifteen, was the subject of women. That sounds strange, I suppose. But go back. What did you know about women at fifteen? Or about yourself? My brother knew no more, but he *acted* on the little he did know, we were afraid. Especially we who grow up in such a social life as I have been talking of; we are afraid. My brother was never afraid of anything. If he wants a thing he makes one bound and grabs it. If he hates a thing he makes another bound and hits it. I've seen a man flinch just because my brother looked at him. As for women, humph! He had only to hold up his hand.

"Now I don't offer it as a proof of virtue, but at twenty-one I had not bothered with girls much. I will explain in a minute why this was the case. For the same reason I did not smoke or play cards. Let me get back to my brother.

"One mid-term my mother got a letter from the

head-master saying he regretted that he had been under the painful necessity of expelling Francis Carville from the school. He had been caught *flagrante delicto*, as the old chap said, and one of the maids had been dismissed. You can imagine how a thing like that upset my mother. Old Colonial morality was pretty strict I have read, and in any case when these things happen in your own family it is very different from reading about them in the Press. But what raised our worry still higher was the curious fact that although he had been expelled and put on the London train at Maldon, he hadn't turned up."

There was another pause as Mr. Carville struck a match. It was nearly dark and we watched his face reflecting the glow. Suddenly Bill realized the time and rose.

"Won't you stay to dinner?" she asked.

"No thank you," he said. "Mrs. Carville's going into Newark this evening, I believe, and we're going to take the boys to a show." He rose. "I must get back. Good-night."

"Come in and finish your story," said Mac.

"All right. Good-night and thank you." He lifted his hat and stepped off the porch.

CHAPTER VII

DIAPORESIS

THE discussion at dinner that evening was unexpectedly animated. We all had our theories to propound, our notes to compare and our criticisms to offer. To this I contributed my share, but reserved a conclusion to which I had been approaching all through the tale. I wished to submit it to the tests of coffee and music, to become more familiar with it before I exposed it to Bill's shrewd scrutiny and Mac's sardonic judgment.

To my surprise they insisted upon the strangeness of the story.

"To my mind," I said, "the story can scarcely be called strange, so far."

"I wonder where his brother got to after he was expelled," said Bill.

"Do you think Cecil's man is the brother?" asked Mac.

"You mean interesting," I continued.

"Well," said Mac, "interesting if you like. That don't make it any the less strange. Is Cecil's man —?"

"The really strange part of this man's story," I declared, oracularly, "is the fact that he is telling it; mark that! And a stranger thing still is the *way* he is telling it!"

"Ex cathedra!" said Mac, sarcastically.

“Explain it all over again,” said Bill.

I did so, but they saw no brilliance in my explanation. They were artistic, but not artistic enough to appreciate the nuance of the story-telling art. Perhaps this is nothing against them. Each to his trade. And yet—*sugar-plums!*

It pleased my friend that evening to undertake the rendering of a work which, unfortunately, can only be butchered on a piano. Of all Wagner’s music the *Walküren Ride* is least adapted to our homely instrument. Nevertheless the wild clatter, the exciting crepitation of the treble, the thunderous booming of the bass, and above all the tremendous crash with which it ends, always stimulates me to fresh mental effort. I saw plainly, as I listened, that my surmise was correct. I saw that I had no need to wait for the explanation of the phrase: “An author? Ah!” I saw, in short, that Mr. Carville, whatever he might be in the eyes of his wife, his brother, or of the world, was a potential artist. As I recapitulated to myself the various points in his tale, the careful balancing of his narrative with sententious criticism of life, the occasional fiction, to give verisimilitude to trivial events (the incident of Belvoir for example), and particularly his abrupt departure in the dusk, leaving us guessing, I felt certain that for me his tale would have a *dénouement* of peculiar interest. Already I perceived the deliberate attempt of the man to convey the obscure and rare emotion which dominated his intellectual life.

Afterwards, in the studio, I suggested that the

story of Turner's sugar-plums might throw some light upon Mr. Carville's story.

"How?" said Mac, who is reluctant to see profane hands touch the master-colourist's memory. I explained again.

"He is taking a lot of romantic episodes, mixing them up, adding a little imaginary landscape and offering it to us," I said. "We asked for a story. We shall have it, says he."

"He's such an ordinary looking chap," began Mac. Bill laughed.

"So am I," I retorted with a grin.

"You know what I mean," he protested. "I meant ordinary in voice and general tone. But if what you say is true he must be a damn clever chap."

"An artist," I agreed.

"I can't make him out," said Bill, sewing busily. "What in the world has all this to do with his children? *I* want to know where they met."

"So you will, dear lady, never fear," I said, smiling. "I think Mr. Carville understands your desire perfectly."

"Oh, I know I'm a very simple person——" she began.

"By no means," I cried. "Mr. Carville would never suggest such a thing. But think for a moment! Is it not a fair guess that a man like our neighbour, who has had such a varied career, who can divine *my* interest in him as an author, and Mac's as an artist, will be able to fathom the reason why you watch him with a tense and silent stare?"

"Did I stare?" she said. "I'm sorry."

"We all stared," I returned. "Anyone would."

The telephone rang and Mac went to answer it. We could hear his voice plainly on the staircase.

"Hello! Who is it? Oh, good evening, Miss Fraenkel—yes, do. We're not going out to-night. How long will you be? Right. Good-bye."

"She'll be up in half an hour," he said, going back to his easel.

I was by no means certain that Miss Fraenkel would be able to help us to forecast accurately the future instalments of the Carville history. Of course if we could induce her to assume that the painter-cousin's strange companion was Mr. Carville's brother, she might begin to treat the subject with the necessary seriousness. But I had no hope of this. I was too conscious of the extreme subtlety of Mr. Carville's art (we may grant him that now in advance) to think that we could transmit its fascination to Miss Fraenkel. She would probably be astonished at the continuance of our curiosity.

She was. She began, the moment she arrived, to tell us the vicissitudes of a cause to which she had been rapidly and earnestly converted, the cause of female suffrage. It was evident that her reason for calling was to "let off steam," as Mac irreverently phrased it afterwards. A number of millionaires' daughters had drawn upon themselves the eyes of the world by tramping on foot to Washington to plead for the vote. Miss Fraenkel's eyes dilated as she told us. We had seen the account

of what the *New York Daily News* called "The Hike of the Golden Girls," but our eyes had not dilated. We had even acrimoniously hinted that the millionaires' daughters were seeking notoriety rather than a relief for civil disabilities by this undignified tramp across New Jersey and Maryland. But to Miss Fraenkel we said nothing of this. Even if we had been averse to Miss Fraenkel having a vote, we would have said nothing. Only Bill suggested with a smile that the leading "hiker" need not have offered to kiss the President when he good-humouredly granted them an interview. Miss Fraenkel could not see it. There was no divinity that she knew of to hedge a President from a kiss.

"What about the President's wife?" asked Bill.

"Why, *she's* one of us!" cried Miss Fraenkel. "She approves!"

"Of kissing her husband?" asked Bill.

But Miss Fraenkel's mind was fashioned in water-tight compartments. She could not switch her enthusiasm from the vote long enough to appreciate this lapse from good taste. Her mind did not work that way. We would have to begin at the beginning and lead up to kissing as a moral or immoral act, before she could give it any serious attention. And when she asked Bill to join the local league I interposed, lest the harmony of the evening should be violated.

"We want your vote on another question," I said, and recounted the events of the afternoon. She listened with apparent attention, playing with

a string of beads that hung round her neck. Long before I finished I saw she was ready to speak.

"I'll go right in and ask her if she'll join!" she said.

"They've gone to Newark," said Mac.

"To-morrow, then."

"Well," said Bill. "Come up here to-morrow. He's coming in to tell us some more. You'll meet him first and he can introduce you to his wife."

"That'll do first rate! I'm just crazy to get all the members I can."

The conversation rambled on irrelevantly after that, and we realized that for Miss Fraenkel at least, the story of Mr. Carville's life was not absorbingly attractive. We enjoyed her visit, as we always did, but her influence, in her present pre-occupation, was feverish and to a certain slight degree disturbing.

The problem that presented itself when I retired that night was immaterial, perhaps, but new. I wondered quietly in what manner Mr. Carville would regard Miss Fraenkel. Doubtless I was over-exacting, but I desired to discover, in our neighbour's attitude towards the lady, some clue to his attitude towards us. I felt vaguely that his candour was not at all a mere casual fit of communicativeness of which we "just happened" to be the recipients. If this were the case, it would infallibly appear in his manner towards our voteless friend. It would be . . . but no. My vanity did not carry me that far. The vanity of a man of forty is generally a steed broken to harness; it will not prance far into the unknown. I decided to

wait until Mr. Carville decided the matter for himself.

* * * * *

The spectacle, while I was shaving next morning, of Mr. Carville proceeding sedately down Van Diemen's Avenue with his children, gave a fresh vagueness to his image in my mind. It was as though a hand had been passed over the picture, smudging the outlines and rendering the whole thing of dubious value. A model father! In my bewilderment I nearly cut myself. And yet, supposing, as I had been supposing, that Mr. Carville had set out with the definite object of contrasting himself vividly with his prodigal brother, would he not eventually take up the rôle of dutiful parentage? The extraordinary thing was that the model father should be also the artist.

I determined to abandon the Carville problem for an hour or two after breakfast in favour of Maupassant. It is my custom to read once a year at least, the chief works of that incomparable writer. The forenoon of our Sunday has this peculiarity: no moral obligation to work is imposed by our unwritten laws. If, on Sunday morning, I am discovered by Bill leisurely turning over a pile of old magazines, or reading a story, I am not greeted with "Do you call that work?" On the contrary, she will probably sit down beside me and indulge in what may be charitably described as gossip. Mac, too, will leave his palette and boards in peace, will lie luxuriantly in the big rocker, or,

spade on shoulder, disappear among the shrubs at the lower end of the estate. We neglect collars and appear brazenly at breakfast in shirt-sleeves on Sunday mornings. It is for us a day of rest from the insistent badgering of ideas. Our minds go into negligence; we forget editors and advertising-managers for a while. Imagine then our dismay when I reported my view of Mr. Carville in his brushed blue serge and Derby hat, his glazed linen collar and dark green tie, passing sedately down the Avenue, a neat child in each hand. There seemed to be no rift in this man's armour of respectability. He seemed determined to maintain a great and terrible contrast between his inner and outer life. O supreme artist! I stretched myself on my sofa and opened Maupassant:

"Monsieur," I read. "Doctor James Ferdinand does not exist, but the man whose eyes you saw does, and you will certainly recognize his eyes. This man has committed two crimes, for which he does not feel any remorse, but, as a psychologist, he is afraid of some day yielding to the irresistible temptation of confessing his crimes."

I laid down the book, drawn by the aptness of the text to my problem. Had Maupassant given me the key of the whole enigma? Was this astonishing genius, who had so wrought upon our imaginations, was he a criminal irresistibly driven to tell us the story of his evil life? Were the police of Europe and America even now scouring the surface of the globe for him? That brother, that daredevil gentleman of the painter-cousin's letter, was a fitting accomplice for him, the quiet, unobtrusive,

impeccable "seaman." He had a number, what was it? Three-nine- (fool not to write it down!) three-nine-something. Was that his number during his last imprisonment? Had he spoken in terrific hyperbole when he admitted that no doubt it was "a picturesque life"? Good God! How blind we had been! And Miss Fraenkel's shot in the dark, was it after all the truth? Had he really been "held for something"?

I let my pipe go out, so possessed was I, temporarily, with the diabolical possibility. A double knock at the door sent the blood to my heart. I rose, and passing into the front room opened the door. Mr. Carville stood in the porch in an attitude of profound meditation. The sight of him, phlegmatic and isolated from all emotion, restored the balance of my mind somewhat. We shook hands and he still stood there, trying to remember something.

"Another fine day," I said. "I saw you out early this morning."

He nodded absently, and then his face lightened.

Somewhat to my surprise, if any further surprise was possible, he lifted his steady grey-blue eyes to mine, raised his right hand as high as his shoulder and began to recite.

"When that the Knight had thus his tale i-told,
In al the route was ther young ne old
That he ne seyde it was a noble story,
And worthy to be drawn to memory."

And extending a finger he pointed to the little brass Canterbury Pilgrim that served us for a knocker. "They told stories too, eh?" he said, smiling.

"You read Chaucer?" I murmured, staggering to a chair in the porch.

"Why, sure!" he said, "don't you?" And he took out his pipe.

I did not pursue the subject, even when I had recovered my poise. The clever application of the Chaucerian verse to his own case was crushing. I said nothing of it to Mac when he appeared with a pair of shears intended for the borders.

"Hullo, Mr. Carville," he said. "Come to finish the story? Wait till I tell the wife."

"Now where's the hurry?" said our neighbour, deprecatingly, and sitting down he began to cut up some tobacco. I looked across at New York, still surrounded in diaphanous mist, and endeavoured to adjust my mind to the immediate business. Since dinner the night before I had been indulging in somewhat frothy speculation. It was only fair that Mr. Carville should have the floor and speak for himself. Bill came out and nodded brightly. None of us suggested waiting for Miss Fraenkel. I think we were anxious to hear a little more of Mr. Carville before Miss Fraenkel arrived; a sort of pre-sentiment, if you like.

"Do tell us about your brother, Mr. Carville," said Bill. "What happened to him?"

Mr. Carville struck a match and puffed away in the conscientious manner demanded by a corn-cob.

"Why, of course," he said, carefully expelling a jet of smoke from the corner of his closed lips, "he came back, my brother did."

Bill looked at him in tragic annoyance.

CHAPTER VIII

HE CONTINUES HIS TALE

“**I**T was like this,” he went on. “Apart from a general dislike of doing things that boys consider ‘bad form’ my brother had no scruples at all. For instance, if a stranger cheeks you, you *feel* as if you’d like to hit him. My young brother *did* hit him. What was still more to his advantage he gave people the impression that he was always ready to jump over the table at them. My impression is that the old Head didn’t dare flog him and had been glad to find an excuse to get rid of him. It didn’t occur to the old chap that my brother wouldn’t come home. He little knew my brother!

“Several days passed and we began to get anxious. My mother telegraphed the Head and the railway company. No good. Now it’s all very well for well-meaning people to say ‘tell the police,’ but when you are up against a private disgrace, you think pretty hard before you walk into a police station. My brother was fifteen and big for his age. Why, he might disguise himself anyhow. The week-end came before we made up our minds that the police would have to be notified. I went to Scotland Yard on the Saturday afternoon with a reward and description. I don’t pretend that I felt very anxious about him. He had never sought either my friendship or my protection, and we

looked at life from totally different angles. To me there was something common and dirty about an intrigue with a school-slavey. My brother, I thought, should have been above that sort of thing. But he wasn't and he never has been. With him a woman is just a woman. He raises his hand and they come running, and apologizing if they're late. So after I had been to Scotland Yard, I stayed down West, went to a theatre and looked in at *El Vino* for a glass of port afterwards. *El Vino* in those days had a curious reputation, quite different from the Continental or the Leicester Lounge. No one would ever suggest you were a loose fish because you drank a dock-glass in *El Vino*, though there were women there every night. Just as I was lifting the glass some one gave me a slap on the back. It was my young brother.

“‘Hullo, Charley!’ he says. ‘Fancy *you* here.’

“‘What are *you* doing here?’ I asked him. I realized he was as tall as I was. ‘Why aren’t you at home?’

“‘I’m coming home with you, Charley boy,’ he says, looking round at the girls. ‘All the old talent here, you see!’

“I own frankly I was disgusted. I was so disgusted I never went into that place again. We got the 12.20 at King’s Cross and it was a quarter past one in the morning before we arrived at our house. Here was a nice state of things; the elder son finding his fifteen-year-old brother in *El Vino*, and coming home with the milk. That was my brother’s way all along. He made everything I do

seem a black sin. I left him to tell his own story and turned in.

“The next morning he went on the carpet. My mother gave him a pretty hot talking to. She told him he was a disgrace to the name of Carville, that he’d begun bad and would go to worse. She asked him how she was ever to get him into a position if he left school like that and for such a reason. He took out a cigarette-case and helped himself. ‘No need to worry, mater,’ says he, ‘I’ve got a position already.’

“And so he had! He’d gone into the city and got a position in a big wholesale house as a clerk. Ask me how he did it and all I can say is ‘Personality.’ He could do anything with anybody. There he was, fifteen, with a guinea a week to start. And I was twenty-two and only getting a few shillings more.

“After the first shock my mother resigned herself to the inevitable and hoped for the best. And for a couple of years we managed to rub along without any scandals. In our several ways, my brother and I were busy with life, as far as we knew it. He went up to the city every day, and played football and cricket, but the serious business of his life was girls. He seemed to have hundreds. If I saw him in the Strand, on Saturday, he would be with three or four. If I met him on Hadley Common, on Sunday, he would have three or four there, but fresh ones. He had them in the trains, he lunched with them in the city. Barring the few hours he spent in our house at night he lived chiefly

on girls. There were a score or so in the house where he worked, a wholesale business in Wood Street. It was a mania, you might say; but it was the girls who had the mania, not he. He spent all his money as he got it on them, he borrowed more and spent that. One thing particularly annoyed me just about this time, and that was his free way of borrowing my clothes when they fitted him. Vests and ties especially. You may think it a trivial matter, but to me there was something exasperating in seeing one's brother on a park seat in the dusk, with his girl's head leaning on one's own fancy vest! He would just shy whatever he had borrowed on the bed and leave me to pick the hair off it. What they call a *Superman*, I believe, nowadays. I had another name for him.

"Apart from these annoyances, I was sliding along a well-oiled groove in life. It generally happens that a young man in such a position as mine marries and settles down for good. Now it may have been that my brother's wholesale dealings with girls threw me to the other extreme. I don't think that had much to do with it. I think, now, that I had a natural bend towards Culture.

"Don't misunderstand me," said Mr. Carville. "I use that word without any doubt of what it means. I know George Du Maurier's sneers. Culture means an instinct for the best. I had that. I have it now.

"I don't say that culture is opposed to marriage. That would be nonsense. But it may seriously interfere with marriage. A young man in the

twenties has no irresistible desire for matrimony. As a rule I mean. And if sport or business or, as in my case, study, takes up his attention, he will put it off for a while. That's what happened to me. I had access to books. I had an easy job and no great responsibility. I knew nothing about the world really; I only read about it in books. It seemed to me a splendid thing to be a learned man. I became a book-worm, reading several hours a day. What was I aiming at? Upon my soul I can't say. It was just blind instinct leading me on to read the books that since then have become part of me.

"My work was, as I said, light. The firm I was with were specialists in certain machinery, and I was assistant to the London manager. I had to plan out and make estimates for various plants, and travel about the south of England getting orders and superintending erection. I can tell you it just suited me, those journeys by train. I always had my book with me, and as soon as I had been over a job, I forgot all about contracts and went back to Pater, or Gibbon or Flaubert or Emerson, whoever I happened to be reading. In the evenings I used to try and imitate what I had read.

"But what could I write? What did I know? Nothing! I had never been anywhere, I had never met anybody in particular, I had never been in love. I had never waked up. I was in a sort of trance, surrounded by the traditions of the genteel professional class. Of course, in a dim way I knew that my mother expected me to be something ex-

ceptional, but I was too comfortable to make any effort. It seemed to me I was quite unconventional enough in being such a reader and in keeping clear of girls. I wonder where I would have landed, supposing I had never waked up.

“My brother was going his way all this time, when all of a sudden he roused me up again. For a long time he had been earning twenty-five shillings a week and spending forty, and my mother had been making good the deficit. She had just given him a five-pound note to pay for his quarterly season-ticket on the railway. He didn’t pay it. Just went on travelling to the city with the old one. Of course, a lot of people had done that trick and the Company were wise to it. My brother was caught and summoned before the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House. You can believe my mother was distressed. It wouldn’t have been so bad if he had only held his tongue and let her pay the forty shillings fine and costs. No! he had to give the Lord Mayor a piece of his mind. And that made the evening papers feature the amusing incident, as they call it.

“I must admit the boy made out a very good case. He told the Court his father, his brother and himself had been travelling over the line for something like sixteen years. Altogether we had paid the railways two hundred pounds in fares. ‘Now,’ says he to the Court, ‘if I had done two hundred pounds worth of business with a firm, they wouldn’t be down on me for being a day or two late with a small account of five pounds, would they?’

They'd be glad to accommodate me. But the railway wants to put me in prison.' Well, the Lord Mayor happened to be a shareholder in the railway, and of course he couldn't admit that at all. He fined him the regulation forty shillings and several pounds cost. But as I said, this peculiar argument of my brother's got the case into a prominent position and everybody saw it. His employers saw it and cashiered him the next morning. My uncle, who lived at Surbiton, saw it and wrote to my mother.

"The first I saw of it was in the papers. I remember feeling sick and giddy all over when I saw our name in the police court news. '*The Seamy Side*' they called it. When I got home my brother and my mother were having it out. He didn't care. It was all over for him, he admitted. Better let him start afresh somewhere else. My mother wanted to send him to Canada, where she had relatives, but he said he'd be damned if he went to Canada. He was sick of clerking. What did he want to do? I asked him. He said he was going in for engineering. I smiled at this, and he rounded on me. 'Oh I don't mean your engineering,' he says. 'I mean something that's worth while.' Very sneering he was.

"Well, do you know what he did? He got fifty pounds out of my mother to start with and disappeared. That's all. Simply vanished without a word. In a way it was a relief. We gave out that he had gone to Canada and the scandal died down. A month later my uncle wrote and mentioned that

Frank had called on him and borrowed fifty pounds to go to New Zealand with. I don't know how he managed to do it, for my uncle doesn't let go easy at all. He has had to work for his money too hard. Personality, I suppose. If my brother had had a five-minute personal interview with the Lord Mayor I daresay he would have got the old chap to pay the fine for him.

"After this little brush-up my mother and I jogged along for a few years as quiet as before. I was still in my job as manager's assistant, and still reading away into the classics. I was about twenty-five when all my ideas and prejudices slid away over side and I found I had got the disease we call love. It nearly killed me."

Mr. Carville paused and leaned over to knock his pipe against the geranium-tub. We did not interrogate him. There was something numbing to me in the thought of this quiet ordinary little man telling us in a quiet matter-of-fact tone that love had nearly killed him. We had no comment worthy of the fact. He looked across the valley for a moment as though lost in retrospection.

"She came home from a convent in Brussels," he continued, feeling for his little brass box, "and to use the slang of our professional class, her people knew my people. That was the way we talked. If a thing was good, we called it 'ripping.' If it was unpleasant, we said it was 'beastly.' I believe the slang has changed since then, but the silly artificial spirit of it will never change. Why can't educated people speak English?"

"She came home from a convent in Brussels. Her home was about a mile off, a big house in East Barnet, and she called with her mother one day when I happened to come home from a journey early. She gave me a look. . . .

"You see, she wasn't beautiful. She was well-dressed and well-mannered and she had grey eyes. Beyond that I haven't any distinct memory of what she was like. And the astounding thing to me, when I look back on that business, is the utter lack of any common interests. How *could* I expect her to take any notice of me? I was a book-worm. I couldn't do any of the social tricks she admired. I knew as much about music as a cow, and considered tennis a bore. And yet I wanted her. I wanted that eighteen-year-old girl as I've never wanted anything since. I made myself a door-mat for her feet, I took her impudence and said nothing, I waited for her and made no complaint when she forgot to keep an appointment. My mother saw it and did her best to help me (though it wasn't much), for she wanted me to get married. This would have been a good match, for it so happened that 'her people' were in a position to advance me in my profession, as I called it.

"And strange to say, my persistence did make some impression. I did make some headway. I chucked my books to one side, went in for tennis, and even took girls up the river to Kingston and Bourne End, she being one of them. It made a hole in the little bank account I had started, but I suppose it was worth it. I met a lot of pretty girls;

but I was not after a pretty girl; I was after her. The river was a lot in my favour, I believe. It so happened that Belvoir's young brother, a Charterhouse boy, whom I knew slightly, nearly ran our punt down one Saturday with his launch. It made a big impression on Gladys, my knowing young Belvoir. You see she had been at school with Belvoir's cousin, so it all worked in. In a way I suppose I was happy . . . yes, it's a wonderful thing, a tremendous thing to be in love; but all the same, I wouldn't like to go through it again!

"So it stood, when one day in the autumn, the whole thing capsized. My brother came back.

"He didn't come back like any other prodigal I ever heard of. No, he came back in his own way, like a conquering hero, which he was. He came back on an automobile.

"You laugh? But you must remember that in those days there weren't fifty automobiles in England. When my brother came up the London Road with a whiz and a bang, a long trail of blue stench coming out of the back of the machine, I really think that was the third or fourth time I had ever seen such a thing. Well, there he was, a great big chap with a hooked nose and flashing black eyes behind the goggles. Where had he been? Neither to Canada nor to New Zealand. He'd been to France. He'd gone there and learned the motor-car business in one of the first shops ever built. Picked it up you may say, as he picked everything up, but he got it none the less. He'd seen the possibilities of the thing, and here he was

appointed London agent for the French firm at three hundred a year. He laughed when he saw me. 'Hullo, Charley!' he sneers. 'How's the puff-puffs?' He sneered at everything about me. I had learned to read French pretty well and knew my classics in the original, but here was my young brother sneering at me in French *argot* which he knew I couldn't resent because I couldn't understand it.

"He would come down to the tennis club that evening, though I didn't want him. Somehow I dreaded introducing him to Gladys. There was no need for me to worry. He introduced himself. In another five minutes he was talking French with her, and she was screaming with laughter at the stories he told her. He saw her home . . .

"You can understand that the next day I was in a bad condition for work. And it so happened that I had a job that needed all the concentration I could give it. I don't remember a single detail of it. I had been neglecting my work then, like all young chaps in love, but on this occasion I made a costly mistake. I marked the driving pulley on a line-shaft a foot too small. The aggravating part was I sent it to the head office in Yorkshire without revising it and *they* got on to my boss. He took the bit in his teeth and went for me. He gave me a week to find another job. I was 'down and out.'

"I was paralyzed for a while. I didn't know where to turn. The bottom had dropped out of my world for good and all. Another job! Why, I knew men in that employ who had held their jobs for forty years.

"I said nothing about it at home. My brother, with his three hundred a year and his French *argot*, made home unbearable and I thought of clearing out of it. But where could I go? You see, if you work for some specialist for a number of years, the only job you can move to is a position with another specialist of the same line. And this business I was in was run by about six big firms.

"Still, the thought of clearing out held me. I saw that if my brother was going to live at home, I'd have to go. And Saturday came round and found me wondering what to do.

"At times I used to go over to my uncle's at Surbiton. It was my duty to pay respects, so to speak. His family had a grudge against my mother, because if my father hadn't married her, they would have inherited his money, so that there was not much love lost between them. But occasionally my old uncle would ring me up and ask me to go down with him. He did this Saturday I speak of, and as there was no one else in my office at the time I told him my trouble. And he laughed! Humph!

"The inhuman old shell-back laughed! And yet, if you'll believe me, when I heard the old chap rumbling at the other end of the wire, it cheered me up. I began to think, 'Why, he may have influence. He may get me a job.' You see the vicious state of mind of the professional class! When I mentioned the possibility to him, he said, 'I can get you a job all right. How'd you like to go to sea?'

"I nearly dropped the receiver when he said that.

Go to sea! People in residential suburbs didn't go to sea!

"‘Eh?’ I said. ‘What d’you mean?’

"‘What I said,’ he bellows. ‘Go to sea.’

"‘I’ll come round and talk to you,’ I said.

"I went round and found him in the office. He was a fierce old chap, burnt black with sun, and with hair grey as the sea. He was enjoying his life apparently, bossing things in that office. But he told me at once that he could do no more than give me a chance to start at the bottom. I must work up and pass the Board of Trade tests for each grade. I give him credit for painting the picture as dark as he could. He even suggested I should try and get another draughtsman’s job if I was afraid of going through the mill. But I didn’t know enough to be afraid, and asked him off-hand when he would need me.

"‘We don’t need you,’ he said, as if surprised. ‘We can get a couple of thousand young fellows to-morrow if we want them. It’s up to you.’

"That was the first slap in the face. I sat there in that great gloomy vault of an office in Fenchurch Street, looking at the half-models of ships and a map of the docks at Monte Video on the walls, and wondering what I should do. I was not hesitating, you understand, because of pride. No, that was gone. My brother, when he saw Gladys home, had done for that. It was more like a fear gripping at me. I was scared at letting go of my professional easy-going life. I’d never been on a ship since I’d been born on one. I knew nothing about

marine engineering. I hesitated because I was afraid.

“‘When shall I start?’ I asked after a while.

“‘The *Corydon*’s in the river now,’ said my uncle. ‘They want a Fourth: can you get down to-night?’

“‘To-night!’ I said. ‘I’ve not given notice yet!’

“‘Phone from here,’ he says.

“‘But I’ve nothing packed,’ I whimpered. And he laughed.

“I know now why he laughed. Partly because a landsman is always rather a comic figure to a sailor, partly because he knew how I had been brought up. He had never agreed with the theory of gentility which had taken such a hold of my mother. He was as out of place in his Surbiton home as a bear in a back-yard. His daughters, my cousins, couldn’t make him see the importance, in England, of gentility. When he and my father and all the rest of them had been boys on that New England farm, they had had to clear stones off the land. No stones, no dinner. And now he had a house in Surbiton, and was laughing at me, who had never lifted a stone in my life. Even in the works where I was a pupil we had always had a little private lavatory to wash and change in. He laughed at me. He believed one trip would be enough for me. He didn’t believe for a minute that I would stick to it.

“But I was making up my mind. Somehow or other, in spite of my twenty-five years in cotton-wool, I had imagination enough to see in my uncle’s weather-beaten old face something that was not in

the city faces I saw every day. He had come into London out of an alien world. Then, I argued, there are other worlds beside this one! I had not realized it before! All the time I was snug in my little job in Victoria Street men were out on the sea, out in the heat and cold and wet, living in a totally different world to mine. You may think it a foolish and common enough idea, but to me it was dazzling, blinding. It took hold of me. I could think of nothing else. I said, 'I'll go, but I can't go to-night, I've nothing to wear.' So my uncle told me to go to Cardiff and meet the *Corydon* at Barry Dock.

"'What's she like?' I said, standing up. He took me into another office, and showed me a beautiful model of a steamer.

"'There she is,' he says. 'That's the old *Corydon*. I commanded her for three years.' I can tell you I was pleased to think I was going to sea in such a fine ship. Humph!

"I went home and had a talk with my mother. All *her* ideas were capsized too. Here was her eldest son, the quiet, studious, respectable elder son, out of employment, while her harum-scarum disobedient Frank was getting three hundred a year and with good prospects. She was all bewildered by it. You can't blame her. She looked at me when I told her what I was going to do. 'Take plenty of socks,' she said, quietly. 'You'll need them at sea.' And I suddenly remembered she'd done the very same thing I was to do, long ago; broken out of her life and made a fresh start—on the sea.

“And what had happened to me? You’ll think I was a pretty cheap sort of a lover to let my brother cut me out so easy as that. You’ll say I never really loved her. Who can tell that? Who can say how much or how little he loves? Yes, yes, I loved her. But what, I ask you, is the use of a man mooning his life away for a girl who has never given him a minute’s thought? It is a waste of time and energy and life. When that view of worlds outside of mine broke on me the love-trance broke. I said to myself: ‘I am young; I will go out and see things.’ Well, I went out and I saw things, and I don’t regret it. But there’s one thing we never see again, and that’s the illusion of first love.

“I begged my mother to say nothing to Frank about me until I was gone, and a day or two later I slipped away to Paddington with a couple of grips and took the train to Barry Docks. It will give you an idea of the quiet life I had led when I tell you this was my first long journey. I had been to places within one hundred and fifty miles of London, but never farther. I felt lost when they turned me out on the platform at Barry in the rain and dark. A sea-port is not a very attractive place to a landsman.

“The next twenty-four hours were strenuous for me. More than once I wondered if I could live through it. When I got to the dock I walked up and down looking for a ship that resembled the model of the *Corydon*. There weren’t any. I asked a man in a blue frock-coat if the *Corydon* had come in.

“‘Aye,’ says he. ‘Here she is, just abaft of ye,’ and he pointed to a rusty, dirty old tub with a battered funnel and a bridge all blocked with hatches. That the beautiful shiny *Corydon*? There was the name on her stern—*Corydon, London*. She was loading coal from a big elevator. Her decks were piled high with it, and where there wasn’t coal there was mud, black oozy mud, and ashes and ropes and soppy hatches. I climbed up the ladder and one by one got my grips aboard. And I stood there in the rain, my gloves all black with the coal on the ladder, my nice mackintosh barred with it, and my boots slipping on the iron plates. No one took any notice of me. Men went to and fro in oilskins and shouted, but they didn’t seem to see me. Just for a moment I thought of bolting! Humph!

“Finally I spoke to one of the men, saying I had a letter for the chief engineer. He took me round into a dark alleyway under the bridge-deck aft and shouted down: ‘Here comes the Second,’ he says. ‘He’ll fix ye.’

“Well, he came up, that Second did, not very pleased at being disturbed. ‘What is it?’ he says. He was grease from head to foot, as though some one had been rolling him in a sewer.

“‘I’m the Fourth Engineer,’ I said. ‘Oh, are ye,’ says he, ‘I thought ye were comin’ this mornin’. Better get a boiler-suit on and give a hand. We’re goin’ to sea to-morrow noon.’

“He took me along the alleyway and unlocked a door. ‘There,’ says he, ‘there’s your room. Ye

share wi' the Third.' It was a smelly little hole, and so dark I could scarcely make out the bunks.

"'I haven't a boiler-suit with me,' I said, and he looked at me. He was a younger man than I was, and I felt it would be strange to have to take orders from him. 'Oh,' he says, 'you're about my size, I'll lend you one.' I couldn't help thinking as he went into his berth next to ours, that if he was the Second and I was the Fourth, what on earth would I be like when we got to sea?

"And then he took me down below.

"That was my introduction to my new career. No handshakes, no good night's rest—nothing. I got into the Second's boiler-suit and followed him down. We had to work all night. The Third was down there all the time under the boilers. He was an old chap; must have been sixty, with a moustache that was dirty brown at the tips and grey at the roots, and a crease down each of his cheeks that was always twitching while he chewed. He was lying on his side in a puddle of water, a slush lamp close to his head, working a ratchet-drill into the shell of the boiler. I had to crawl in alongside of him and help him. *Me!* And I'd been writing 'fitters' instructions' in the office for three years. It was a come-down.

"And yet, something inside of me responded to the call. Say it was romance if you like, say it was sentiment, say it was just foolishness. Something inside of me answered to the call. We worked all that night, patching that bad plate on the boiler. The other boilers were under steam, so you can

believe it was hot down under there. My hands were all soft with office work, and in the first few hours I got cuts all over them, and the salt of the boiler-seams got into them and made them raw. What a time it was! It wasn't long before I was as dirty as the rest of them. I forgot all about time or food or sleep; just fetched and carried as I was told. Once the Second, who was screwing the holes we drilled, asked me if I had been to sea before. I said 'No,' and both of them said 'Oh Lord!' I can't blame them now. I've said it myself since, when I've found a new starter on my hands.

"The Chief came down about three o'clock in the morning and looked through the hole in the boiler casing. He was a little man with a glass eye. 'Is the Fourth there?' he says, sucking at his pipe. 'Yes,' I said, and he raps out, 'Yes what?' Humph!

"When the patch was on we had to get the boiler filled and the fires away as soon as we could. I tried to get some information out of the old Third, but he just chewed and spat. When I asked the Second he says, 'Oh Hell, I can't stop to show ye now. Take a hand-lamp and go and see the run o' the pipes yerself.' I was nearly dropping for sheer sleepiness, but I made up my mind I would not give in. At breakfast time the Chief said we'd missed a tide and couldn't get away till midnight, and I thanked God. But it's a funny thing about a steamer, that the more time you have the more work there is to do. We had stores to get stowed away, and as soon as that was done a steam-pipe split

on the fore-deck and we had to go in the rain and patch it. I didn't know where things were; I didn't know the names of things; I didn't know how they should be done. I'd been a gentleman for six years, never soiling my hands except to clean my bicycle. When the Second said to me at tea-time, 'You'd better knock off and turn in. You'll be on watch to-night,' I began to realize what I was in for. I sat on the settee in our room and tried to think. No wonder my old shell-back uncle had laughed. My clothes were lying all round. I had no bedding, nor sea-gear, and I didn't know where to get it. Suddenly the door opened and the Chief came in.

"'Haven't you a letter for me?' he says. I gave it to him. 'Captain Carville's nephew, I see. Coming for a trip, or are you going to stick to it?' I looked at him.

"'I'm going to stick to it if it kills me,' I said. 'I'm here for keeps.' He nodded. He liked that.

"'Got any gear?' he says. I said, 'I've got nothing except an extra suit and some pyjamas.'

"He told me to get washed and go ashore and buy some bedding. 'I don't know how you'll get on with that old Third,' he says. 'The last Fourth left because of him.'

"'I'm not going to leave, sir,' I said. I wasn't going back for anybody. I was going to find out something about life, right away from everybody I'd ever known.

"'Bully for you,' says he, and with that he went away. I went ashore and bought myself some

gear, and by the time I got back it was eight o'clock by my watch.

"Never shall I forget that night. I'd meant to write my mother and uncle and tell them I was all right, but I was too tired and worried. The old Third came aboard at ten o'clock with a skinful, and the Second was rushing round cursing me because there was nobody else to curse. The firemen were drunk and the donkey-man was drunk. And at eleven-fifteen the gong sounded for slow-astern. I stood by the telegraph and worked the handle, and do what I would I kept shutting my eyes. My God! I thought, shall I ever sleep again? The old Third stood near me, his eyes all bloodshot, the crease in his cheek working, his dyed moustache all draggled, his breath—Humph! He was cunning enough to pretend he was all right, helping the Second with the reversing gear. Now and again the Chief would come down and give an order, his glass eye fixing me in a queer way. I never got used to that glass eye. It wasn't part of him, so to speak, and it distracted one's attention. The Chief himself would be talking quite friendly to you, when you would suddenly catch sight of that glass eye glaring at you, full of undying and unreasonable hate. He would be roaring with laughter at some joke, while all the time the glass eye seemed to be calculating a cold-blooded murder. It was strange enough in its socket; but I tell you, when I ran up to call him for a hot bearing one night and he looked across at me with one bright blue eye and the other bloody-red and sunken, and I

saw the glass thing staring at me from the dressing table—Humph!

“At last, about one o’clock in the morning, we were outside, and he sent me up to see if the pilot had gone. Just as I stumbled up on the bridge-deck I saw the pilot going over the side, down a rope ladder. Oh, didn’t I wish I was going with him! She was beginning to roll, you see.

“And yet, though I was in the depths, so to speak, up to the eyes in it, as I stood there in the rain and wind, the sweat bitter cold on my body, I saw the coast-wise lights, and realized with a sudden jump of the heart what I was doing. I was out at sea. And I’d been born at sea. Twenty-six years in cotton-wool! Can you realize what I had done? Somewhere inside of me there was something answering the call. I was going back through toil and sorrow to my own. I was away at last. I went down again into the engine-room and told them that the pilot was gone. The Second says, ‘Get yourself turned in, then.’

“I could have put my head on his shoulder and cried for joy!

“Well, I’ve said enough to give you an idea of the sudden turn in my fortunes. A week ago I was in love, and comfortably tucked away inside a cozy corner of the professional class. My brother was a mysterious prodigal. Suddenly he butts in, and all is changed. He’s snug and safe in a good berth, he’s taken up the tale of his girls just where he left off, and I’m out at sea, Fourth Engineer of a rusty old freighter bound for a place I’d never

heard of: Port Duluth, British Namaqualand. Well, let him marry her and be hanged! I thought; I'm out of that world. I was resolved not to go near London town till I'd worked out my probation on the *Corydon*. I saw that I was back in the Third Form at school again. I saw that my ship-mates knew nothing about culture or public schools or art or gentility. I saw they knew their business, and if I would be willing and quick to jump, they would teach it to me. My only real trouble was that old Third. If he'd only been a little cleaner in his habits! He would lie on the settee when he was off watch, the creases in his cheeks twisting, his blood-shot old eyes fixed on the toes of his red slippers and then—biff!—he would spit on the floor. But even that I could have stood if he'd been more cheerful. He never smiled, only creased his cheeks a little deeper. In time I learned why the last Fourth, a gay young spark of twenty-two, had fled out of the ship. This old Third, old Croasan his name was, didn't care what happened to him. His children were grown up and run away; he was too ignorant to get a certificate, and he was just waiting for a ship to go to the bottom and take him with her. When the Second told me that I didn't believe him. I held, as most people hold, that even a man a hundred years of age will fight like a tom-cat for his life. But I found that the Second was right!

"We struck bad weather as soon as we got into the Bay. The *Corydon* was loaded to her summer draught and here was a westerly gale coming on her bow, and later on her beam. She rolled day and

night, shipping big seas all the time. This rolling washed the bilge water up on the plates in the stoke hold and lifted them, so that the small Welsh coal, like the Lehigh stuff you get here, was washed into the limber and choked the pump suction. Very soon the bilge began to fill. The old ship was leaking like a basket any way, and she took a heavy list to port. All my watch that night, from eight o'clock till twelve, I was on those bilge-pumps trying to make them draw, while the Chief looked after the engines. It was no joke, with her listed over like that, the platform under water and green seas coming down through the skylights. I thought of my pleasant home at Oakleigh Park then, the quiet autumn streets, the bright fire in the dining-room and the cosy warm bed. Oh yes, I thought of it, but not with regret. I was out to win through, and all hell wouldn't have made me desert!

"At twelve o'clock it was pretty serious. The Chief had the Second out to help with the pumps and sent me to call the old Third. It was his watch on the main engines, you see, twelve to four. Our berth was flooded. There was a couple of inches of water on the floor, and at every sea the water flew through the leaky joints of the dead-lights, all over old Croasan. To and fro on the floor my slippers were floating and a torn magazine swam into the room from the alley-way as I opened the door. The oil from the lamp was dripping on to the drawer tops, and every time she gave a deeper roll the light flared. I put the magazine under it to catch the drip, and as I did so I caught sight of a picture in it, a picture

of two men standing on the deck of a ship in a storm. Underneath were the words, 'I think she's sinking.' Curious, wasn't it? That's just what I thought. I turned to old Croasan. He lay in his bunk just as he had come off watch at six o'clock, his dungarees shining with grease, his tattooed arms grey with dirt. He looked eighty years old as he lay there with his bald head against the bottle rack, the pouches under his eyes marking dark shadows on his creased cheeks. I shook him, and he opened his eyes for a second. I hardly knew what I was doing, I was so crazy with sickness and bruises and incessant toil. 'Mr. Croasan,' I shouted at him. 'Eh!' says he, without opening his eyes. 'Oh,' I said, 'I—I think she's sinking.' He opened his eyes for about two seconds and then said to me in a terrible voice just as a big sea crashed over our heads and the ports spurted, 'Let her sink and be damned!' he says and never stirred. I left him there. I ran back to the engine room. I felt I couldn't stay and argue the point with a man who would not make a fight for us, for himself.

"The Chief decided to cut holes in the suction pipe just under the water-line. Then when the pumps sucked them clear, we bound them up with jointing and cut more holes lower down. Oh! it was grand! For fourteen hours we went on doing that, up to our shoulders in the bilge, the grease caking on us in a fresh layer every time we climbed out to get something in the store. The weather eased a little off Finisterre and we got her righted. We went up to the Chief's room to have a nip of whisky.

“‘Ye see,’ said the Second. ‘Ye see, mister, there’s some as dinna care.’

“Old Croasan came out of the bunk when the trouble was over. I felt too proud of what I’d been through to be hard on the poor old chap, proud of being in the thick of it. I was seeing life at last. This was what I’d come for. ‘Ah,’ says the Chief, his glass eye fixing me over his whisky glass, ‘you’ll be marked if you stay on the *Corydon*.’

“I was. It took that old box of misfortune thirty-two days to make Port Duluth. Every day we had some breakdown or other. She was like a good many other ships that fly the Red Ensign, worn out. But did I grumble? Not a bit of it. I looked at it as any man will who’s got sand in him. It was a fight. There was no fighting in Victoria Street; it was simply riding through life on rubber tyres. Books, art, comfort, philosophy, all these things are well enough; but the *Corydon*, the rusty, leaking, treacherous old *Corydon*, with her starting rivets and banging old engines, she was the real thing, the thing to mark a man and teach him what he’s made of.

“I don’t suppose any of you people have ever heard of Port Duluth. I certainly hadn’t. When I asked where it was, the others told me it was ‘up a creek.’ In England this would have meant very little; but I had learned from my mother to call even the Thames a creek, and so I was able to swallow the apparent paradox of a seven-thousand-ton ship insinuating herself up to what was known locally as ‘a railhead.’ When I persisted and wanted

to know the name of the creek, nobody knew, but they said it was one of the channels of the Niger River. Then, I argued in my bookish way, Port Duluth must be in Nigeria. But this wasn't so certain at all. I became acquainted with the ragged edge of the British Empire. I gathered that the boundaries were not entirely settled, but that when the railway was carried along some watershed into the interior, it would link up with another system and our sphere of influence would automatically extend to include Port Duluth. And when I kept on at my shipmates and wanted to know what made the sphere of influence so very precious I received the staggering answer that it was nuts. We were building battle-ships and recruiting armies and building railways and bridges and harbours, for nuts. To me, walking to and fro on the after-deck in the glow of a tropical sunset, it seemed absurd. You see, I knew nothing of raw products. Until I went to sea I didn't know how far the common things come. I didn't know that Yorkshire pig-iron was smelted from Tunisian and Ionian ore, or that the sugar in my tea had gone from Java to New York and from there to Liverpool. I didn't know where things came from nor where they went. The geography at school had some of it no doubt. I can recall some few vague facts about flax at Belfast and jute at Dundee. Humph! That trip to Port Duluth was worth a million geography lessons.

"To begin with, I learned much about rivers. In England a river is something easily comprehended. You can see along it, and across it, and it is locked,

bolted and barred with towns and bridges and weirs and tow-paths. It is no more like an African river than a tame cat is like a leopard. Yet on the map the only difference is that perhaps the large river will have two mouths, and several tributaries running into it, exactly like a branch running into a tree. It wasn't like that at all. I had an atlas with me and when we reached the mouths of the great river I tried to find out where we were on the map. But it was hopeless. Where the map showed one channel there were hundreds on the chart. And the chart was out-of-date. It seemed a dream to me. I was under the impression that navigation nowadays was a humdrum affair of making points, steering on a ruled pencil line on the chart, so much for currents, so much for tides and so on. So it is, no doubt, in a great measure; but we can hardly realize how much of it is sheer skill and gallant daring. Even the men who do it don't realize it because they are always doing it. That first voyage to Port Duluth was a revelation to me in several ways. I had my own private troubles you may be sure. I was as green as grass. My hands blistered and my heart sickened many a time. But I am glad to think I could see other things as well. To me it was thrilling to look out across the oily blue glitter and see a hazy line which was the Ivory Coast. There was the Slave Coast and the Gold Coast—the words had a new significance now! And when I came up out of that awful engine-room and saw the land close in, the eternal grey-green line of mangrove swamp holding up the blazing vault of the sky, I forgot my

troubles. I said to myself in a whisper, 'This is what I came for. This is the world!'

"I asked where we had anchored, seeing no sign of life ashore, and they told me it was the Bar. We must wait for high water. Away ahead was the bar buoy, a white blob on the water. I stood leaning against a stanchion trying to sense the atmosphere of the place until the Second called me, for there was something to do. There was always something to do in that terrible old ship. I went down, and together we wrestled with the dynamo-engine, a cheap contraption with a closed crank chamber full of muddy oil which was supposed to splash into all the bearings, and didn't. We needed a washer, a special sort of thing. The old one was worn out. We needed screws, too, to fasten it with, small brass screws with flat heads that sank in out of sight. When I asked where these were coming from if we hadn't got them on the ship, the Second said with some asperity, that it would be my job to make them on my anchor watch that night. I was surprised at this and made some remark about getting them from ashore, and it so tickled the poor over-worked Second that he stood up suddenly, spun round towards the reversing engine and broke into peals of hysterical laughter. I shall never forget the sight of him as he stood there in his sodden, filthy singlet and dungarees, his arms knotted and burned and bruised, his common little face twisted into an expression of super-human scorn. For a single moment he was sublime, lifted out of himself, with the mere effort of pouring con-

tempt upon my ignorance. He tried to put it into words, and sputtered. He looked as though in a trance and some stormy spirit was struggling within him. The sweat ran off us in streams as we stood there in the light of a couple of slush-lamps flaring in the draught from the stoke-hold door. Then he abruptly abandoned his search for vitriolic language and rushed into the store for a piece of brass rod. It was a curious performance. I was impressed. I realized in a dim way that there was no longer a hardware shop round the corner. The making of those screws was nothing in itself, but it was the principle behind it, the principle of never being stumped. And these rough, uncultured, north-countrymen were my teachers. The Chief fixed me with his one good eye at lunch. 'We don't get things from ashore in this employ,' he observed, and left me to soak it in.

"I suppose I ought to have been down-hearted at being so ignorant and dirty and tired, but I wasn't in the least. It was too interesting. There was a grim irony, to me, in the appalling contrast between the behaviour of that wornout dynamo and the smug theory in the text-books and trade catalogues I had been used to so long. I had read of the way to detect faults in a circuit, but it seemed to me there was no need to look for faults on the *Corydon*; it was the virtues, the sound places, that needed looking for. And yet, strange to say, out of her decrepitude loyalty was born. I found it growing on me day by day, a jealous regard for her, the pity that becomes a sort of cantankerous affection.

“But to go on with that day, we crossed the bar. It was high water at four in the afternoon and I had to go down again to stand by the telegraph. With my head against the reversing engine wheel I could feel the slow vibration of the anchor coming up, and hear the sough of the exhaust coming back from the windlass. The Second and old Croasan stood near by, their faces blank with waiting and fatigue, like the faces of dead men. Old Croasan’s eyelid would flicker now and then and the tip of his tongue would move stealthily round the inside of his lips. He hadn’t shaved for several days and his face was vague and venerable, glistening grey bristles. When he leaned gently against the vice-bench and folding his arms, closed his eyes, he looked like a hundred-years’-old corpse. He closed his eyes. It was not interesting to him, this crossing of the bar.

“Suddenly we got an order, and we started. I went along the tunnel to see the bearings were all oiled, and while I stood in the dark gloom at the far end, with my hand on the dribbling stern-gland, there came a sudden thump and a grinding shock. The turning shaft shook and chattered before my eyes, the propeller outside caught in something, shuddered, broke clear and beat like a flail. Then the ship lifted bodily and fell, bump, bump, bump. I stood there transfixed. What could it be? I looked along the dark tunnel to where the lights of the engine-room showed in a pale glint and I could have sworn I saw the whole bag of tricks move slowly up and subside as the keel floundered across

that ridge of mud and soft rock. She must be breaking in half, I thought. I had heard of such things. I gathered myself up and hurried back to the engine-room, where I found everybody perfectly calm. The ship, it appeared, was now on the bar and it was our business to keep the engines going at full speed until she was gradually urged over. At intervals she bumped. Some mass of rock or clay on which she rested would collapse and immediately the propeller would shove her a little further over. Our vacuum almost disappeared, for the injection pipe got blocked with mud. This meant more work for me in starting the ballast pump, and when that got choked too, I had to open it up and clean the valve-boxes. It didn't seem to matter what happened, there was a new job for me. I wondered with a sort of temporary bitterness whether they would miss me if I dropped suddenly dead. And I was obliged to admit to myself that in all probability they wouldn't. They would just go ahead and do the job themselves and bury me when they got through.

"And this, mind you, was no breakdown, no emergency, but just the ordinary day's work. If the owners didn't want to risk breaking the ship's back on the bar there were plenty of others who would. It was like putting a horse at a dyke, getting his fore-feet across, and then lashing him furiously until he had kicked a lot of earth away and finally got himself over. When I had put the doors on the ballast pump again I noticed the main engines were running normal once more. We were over. We

had crossed the bar. My mind was running on the romantic nature of this performance when I went up to get my tea. I recalled Tennyson's poem and wondered what he would have thought of the old *Corydon* and her undignified scramble across the bar. The others caught something of this in my face, I suppose, for the Second said to the Chief, 'I suppose the Fourth 'll be for the beach to-night, eh?' and they laughed. 'Don't you go ashore here then?' I asked, and they laughed again. 'No, there's nothing to go ashore for,' said the Chief, and he fixed me with his eye. 'Why,' he added, 'don't you know where you are? You're in the middle of all the atrocities here.' The others nodded 'That's right. Any amount of atrocities—round here.' It seemed a silly way of putting it. Here we'd come thousands of miles just to get into the middle of atrocities! For a moment the word conveyed nothing to me. I had been getting into the way of thinking the *Corydon* was by way of being something of an atrocity, but I knew that was not what my ship-mates meant. I'm not sure even now that there ever had been any atrocities in that part of the world. I read about them in a book once; but the things that get into books have always eluded me. Already I had laid hold of that cardinal fact in my new life. The old ideas, the old conventional phrases and assumptions, were cumbersome, inadequate or untrue. Take that word 'atrocity.' Well enough in a radical leading article; but what core of real truth was there in it when it was used by a living man at a railhead up the Niger River? To

anyone with imagination it was comic. But my shipmates were not given to much imagination. In the business of their lives they were alive and original and racy. They used phrases and turns of thought that sometimes thrilled me with their vivid power. But outside of that narrow channel they had nothing but newspaper phrases, like 'atrocities,' mere catchwords that chill one's soul with their bald, withered and bloodless pretensions. The Chief gave me an example of this after tea that night. For a brief spell, by some unforeseen miracle of good fortune, there was nothing to do for the moment, and the four of us, in clean singlets and dungarees, were leaning on the off rail of the after well-deck smoking. Port Duluth was behind us. In front lay a broad, placid sheet of copper-tinted, forest-rimmed water, the confluence of a number of stagnant creeks and back-streams, a sort of knot in the interminable loops and windings of the delta. Here and there in the line of tree-tops was a gap showing where some waterway came through. Here and there, too, I could descry a tiny beach of mud a yard or two wide, with a hut and a canoe tied to the mangrove roots, and black, naked people crouched on their hams in the shadows cast by the forest, engaged in their—to me—mysterious business of living. They were far-away and more or less picturesque. So, too, were the fishermen a mile away on the shining water silhouetted in solid black against the western glow. At the time I was so full of new impressions that I regarded the scene very much as one turns over the pages of a 'book of

views' in a friend's drawing room. I couldn't take it in. That needs time, and also one must have the Key. I was musing upon the apparent meaninglessness of a life that had thrown me up for a moment at a place I'd never heard of before, thrown me up there to assist in the astonishing job of transporting nuts, when the Chief remarked, pointing with the stem of his pipe, 'Here's a chief coming.' I looked round, expecting to see another stout, middle-aged man in singlet and dungarees, with perhaps an old uniform patrol jacket whose brass buttons were green with verdigris. But it was not so. He was indicating a large canoe emerging rapidly from the waterway astern of us. As it came more into our angle of vision I watched with extraordinary expectancy. I was dazed, not only by the spectacle, but by the aplomb with which my shipmates took these things. Here was a savage chief sitting under an immense parasol in the stern of his state canoe, propelled by a score of naked, black paddlers in white loin-cloths and scarlet cricket-caps, coming to call on us. This was evidently his intention, for the accommodation ladder went down with a rattle, and the canoe with her twenty spear-shaped paddles swung alongside like a naval pinnace, and a fat old chap, dressed in a vast white flannel nightgown with a sort of dress-shirt front pleated on it in blue thread, came slowly up the ladder. Came up and walked past with a heavy, flat-footed tread, and disappeared into the saloon with the Old Man. I was too astonished to speak for some time. That old fellow's face behind its broad benevolence and its

confusing tattooings and mutilations, had an expression of power. It was an expression you do not find in London suburbs. You do not find it in the faces of men who sit at a desk and hire you and fire you. The momentary glimpse I had of that chief's face made clear to me many passages in history, many things in literature, many dark and tortuous riddles in the adventures of my own little tinpot soul. And in the light of this discovery I heard the Chief, our chief, saying, 'Yes, these chaps have power of life and death over their people, power of life and death.'

"And for once the hackneyed, battered, old conventional newspaper gibberish had in it the breath of life. I believed it. At that moment, on the threshold of new experiences, I took the words on trust. Perhaps, for once, the things I had read in books had not eluded me! Perhaps the old gentleman in the flannel nightgown really was a potential African despot. In the midst of my reflections I heard another newspaper phrase, 'Not long ago the rivers ran blood.' This was the Second, who was fond of stories inside comic supplements, and who was recalling a bygone 'atrocities,' I suppose. But it was curious to me, to notice how abruptly they all dropped the journalist jargon the moment they spoke of something they really understood. They regaled me with 'atrocities,' with 'rivers running blood' and 'gold in the forests that no white man had ever penetrated,' with 'power of life and death' and so on, but when I inquired anxiously what this omnipotent monarch had come aboard of us for, they replied without any hesitation,

“‘To get a drink.’

“It seemed a contemptible diversion for a person inspiring such awe politically. I don’t say, mind you, that such *was* his object. My shipmates may have been as much in error about his motives as they were about his power. I was too tired, too full of áches and humiliations of my own, to investigate. He passed across my field of vision, and being the first of his kind, left an ineffaceable impression. The sun went down suddenly soon after, and the coppery glow vanished from the water, leaving it a grey blur.

“‘In the middle of all the atrocities’! The flashy, bombastic phraseology came back to me with grim insistence that night when I went down at eight o’clock to look after the boilers and pumps and to make, with entirely inadequate means, those brass screws for the dynamo-engine. The engine-room was in darkness save for the hand-lamp that hung over the vice-bench. The fat cotton-wick smoked and crackled, the light draught swirling it towards my head at times, singeing my hair and making my eyes water. Behind me the silent, heated engines stood up, stark and ominous like some emblem of my destiny watching me. The white faces of the gauges over the starting handles stared blankly. From the stokehold came the occasional clink of a shovel or the hollow clang of a fire-door flung to. And I worked. I fought with the greasy brass and the broken, worn-out tools. I made wasters and started again. The sweat poured off me, and I drank thirstily the warm water in the can that

hung over my head in the ventilator. It was ten o'clock when I realized I had made but one screw. The fireman on duty came through, and remarking that he thought the wind had gone round, climbed the ladder to change the ventilators. I heard the groan of the cowl as he pulled at it and then my lamp flared gustily in a light breeze that came down. Light as it was it was a blessed relief. It was more. It was a message. There was a strange smell about it that gave a new turn to my thoughts. A smell of the land, of the dark forests and fragrant plantations. Another stock phrase came to me—'spicy breezes.' Working there at my miserable task, I wondered if these were the 'spicy breezes' of the hymn-books. Of a sudden I threw down my tools and went up the ladder to look round. All day there had been in my mind a sort of undertow of resentment at the tacit decision that I ought not to want to go ashore. I did want to. It seemed to me an outrage to come so far and remain a prisoner in bondage on the ship. I leaned on the rail by the gangway and looked along the wooden wharf to where a few lights twinkled in the distance. Higher up, beyond the cutting for the railway, the dark mass of a big shed loomed up against the lights of what I supposed was Port Duluth. And from where I stood I could hear a steady rhythmic throb, the unmistakable sound of an engine. I wondered what it could be. Was it one of those weird affairs I remembered in our catalogues, colonial engines with grotesque fireboxes and elaborate funnels, for burning wood instead of coal? I looked round. Nobody

in sight. Everybody was below. The Chief and Second were asleep, old Croasan was in his room with a bottle of gin, drinking steadily. In another moment I had gone down the gangway and was making for the shed. Just then I felt if I didn't speak to somebody who wasn't under the spell of the *Corydon*, I would go crazy. I slipped into an excavation and skinned my knees. I fell over some stacked rails and barked my shins. I heard something scuttling in the darkness. I saw the night-watchman on the *Corydon* standing at the galley door, looking out. And then, looking again towards my objective, I saw an open door in the shed with a short, broad figure showing up sharply against a brightly illuminated interior. I scrambled up the little incline and found a path.

"I was suddenly conscious I had no particular reason for calling upon this unknown person in the middle of the night. It is one of the tragedies of human life that while we do most things by instinct or intuition we have to clamp some 'particular reason' on our actions before we can secure the approbation either of others or of ourselves. Some men, like my young brother, never trouble themselves about it. But all my life I have found myself hesitating upon the edge of actions that might be heroic or fantastic or original or simply desirable, just because I couldn't square them with a particular reason. It was so in this instance. I came into the light of that doorway, and hesitated. But the short, broad figure was not like me. In the most matter-of-fact fashion he nodded his head and said in a

clear voice with a strong foreign accent, 'Good evening. How are you?' And I answered at once that I was very well. He gave the cue, the cue which the *Corydon* had temporarily obliterated from my mind! He stood to one side and let me see into his domain. A large central-draft oil lamp hung in the centre of the roof of a small chamber. There was a door at the back, leading, I surmised, to the boiler room, for in one corner stood the machine that had attracted me from the ship, a curious hunched affair with a violently working apparatus in front and pipes covered with snow curving up and disappearing into the top of it. A small foot-lathe stood by a bench, and on the bench itself was clamped a fret-work table and a partly completed fret-work corner bracket. I wiped my face with my sweat-rag and turned to get a good look at the owner of this variegated display. It seemed to me I was having experiences after all.

"He was young and had never shaved the down which grew on his cheeks and the points of his chin. Young as he was he had the lines of half a century scored under his eyes and on his temples, thin lines on clear, yellow skin. The whites of his eyes were yellow too, as though he had suffered from jaundice. Which he had, as I learned very soon after he opened upon me in a clear, sonorous voice that rolled the r's and beat like a flail on the labials and diphthongs. He wore a blue dungaree boiler-suit, which is a combination affair, you know, and on his head he had an old, greasy, red fez. It seemed to me a preposterous piece of fancy dress up a creek

on the Niger River. But I found later, to my astonishment, that Moslems were common enough there; that they had soaked through from the Mediterranean littoral and the head-waters of the Nile generations ago. Not that this gentleman had soaked through, or was a Moslem either. He had, as he informed me, been all over the world. But it was not his fez, or his jaundiced complexion, or his fret-work, or his languages, or his travels that marked him out for me at the time. It was the simple fact that he was my first foreigner. In spite of my having come in upon him, forced myself upon him as it were, he gave me the impression of being the aggressor. I felt myself throwing up defences against him. It is popular to gibe at the Englishman's taciturnity abroad. There is a reason. The foreigner, not the best nor the aristocratic foreigner perhaps, but the common run of him, act like amiable invaders. They take possession of us, of our language, our idioms, our games, our clothes, our machinery, ideas, everything. They nod and smile and say knowingly 'How are you. All right, eh?' and assume an intimacy you don't permit with your own family. This young chap in the fez had other points, but at the outset I had the most extraordinary sensation of leaning against the door of my soul, trying to keep him out. I don't suppose it struck him that way. I dare say he thought me rather subdued and untidy. He was very hospitable, asking me to 'take a seat' at his bench, and showing me his fret-work. He told me he never wasted any time, as that was the way to succeed. 'If at

first you don't succeed, try, try again,' he sang with the accents all on the wrong syllables. He was very proud of this aphorism, evidently thinking it the secret of our imperial race. And he told me his history. He was born in Damascus, he said, so he knew Arabic. His father emigrated to Bolivia, so he spoke Spanish. Then they pulled up stakes and went to New Zealand, where he learned English. For some mysterious reason they again took ship and came to the Cameroons, where he learned German. His family was now in the Brazils, where no doubt they were learning Portuguese; but he himself had found a very good job here. He was saving money to go to England. He seemed to have no roots, as it were. I wondered, as I have often wondered of other polyglot people I have met, how much of any language they really know, which language do they think in? They always seem to me to resemble those lumps of floating grass one sees in the Gulf Stream, forever drifting onward, footless and fruitless to the end. They never seem to do anything with their marvelous accumulation of languages and knowledge of the world. Perhaps I wrong them. They may have spiritual experiences transcending their gifts of speech. I don't know.

"At that time, too, I was not seeking spiritual communion. The moment I had caught sight of that little lathe I wanted to ask if he could make screws. I wanted screws, brass ones with flat heads. As soon as I could I explained this to him. Yes, he replied, with his smile of supreme intelligence, he

could make screws. How many? And the washer, could he make that? Had he the material? I had the dimensions of that washer burned into my brain and I made a little sketch of it on the bench. But his education hadn't run to scale drawings, so I drew it in perspective and repeated the figures with many gestures indicating roundness and thickness and other properties. He began to make the screws, copying the one I had made laboriously by hand. I offered to assist by putting my foot on the treadle, but he said it was not necessary. 'Too many cooks spoil the broth,' he added, and I felt disconcerted. He didn't mean anything offensive, you know; he was only proud of his English. So I sat watching him, or walked over to the little refrigerating plant thundering away in the corner, with its shining oil cups and its pipes covered with snow or glazed with ice. And while I stood looking at it, a tall, bony native, a dirty loin-cloth wrapped about his middle, his ribs and back all gashed with tribal scars and scaly with skin trouble, came in and laid his corrugated forehead for a moment against the snow on the pipes. He made an astonishing picture, with his thin arms outstretched in support, as though he were supplicating the white man's god. It must have been a confusing phenomenon to his simple mind, that fierce, hot, galloping devil that made ice. And then he gathered a little of the soft snow in his fingers and rubbed it over his face and lips and limped out again. And every little while he or another bony creature very like him would come in and go through the same performance. My friend

at the lathe never looked up, not caring to waste any of his precious time, I suppose, but he observed, when I spoke of it, that the 'ignorant animals liked the taste of snow.' I went back to the bench again and looked at his fret-work. Goodness only knows why he was doing it. It was a meaningless design of dots and wriggles. When I asked him he said he was doing it for a Christmas present for his mother in Pernambuco. He added that she was a Maltese and he had learned Italian from her. I was so oppressed by this amazing knowledge of languages that I couldn't say a word in any language. It seemed silly for us to spend years scraping together a few French words at school when a foreigner like this could gather a dozen tongues in less time. And yet, when you go about the world you will find such people by the score, and you will find them working for and being governed by Englishmen who know no language but their own and not always a great deal of that. I sat there running my fingers over the fret-work bracket that was designed for the Maltese lady in Pernambuco and trying to focus all these novel and conflicting ideas when I suddenly recollected I was on watch. What if something went wrong? I was new to watch-keeping then and had no subconscious sense of responsibility to keep me on the alert. The sudden recollection was like an electric shock. I jumped up, and saying 'I'll be back in a minute,' ran down to the ship and so into the engine room, my heart in my mouth. It was half-past eleven! But there was nothing wrong. I looked at the gauge-glasses on the boilers, peered

into the bilges, and found the fireman at his post in the stokehold. And then I took the old washer and went back to my friend in the fez. Mister George, he called himself. 'My name is English,' he boomed in his reverberating voice. 'George, Mister George.' I never knew his other name, if he had one. There you had the invading quality I have spoken of. He seemed to think he was raised above the common herd of foreigners by having an English name. Mister George had made my screws, with one extra in case of need. And he found a piece of brass that had in it a possible washer. I stood like one in a trance watching him as he fixed it in his little lathe and adjusted the tool-rest and took the first harsh chattering cuts. He was wonderfully efficient. An English mechanic would have jeered at his crazy machine and contemptible bits of tools, and he had an amateurish, ladylike air of flinching from the chips. But he did it much more quickly than I could have done it, I felt humbly. I only wished he would not smile in such a detestable fashion and suddenly assault me with 'How are you now? All right, eh?' I suppose he was practising his English. And as the finishing touch was put on the washer with a thin, snaky file, he asked suddenly if I had any books.

"'Books!' I repeated, surprised; 'what kind of books?' I had an idea he could take no interest in anything save grammars and dictionaries. Somehow, in spite of all his acquirements, one didn't associate that transitory creature with books at all. 'Eh?' he said, harshly, 'I don't understand. You

understand, I wish for books.' 'Yes, what sort?' I asked again. 'It doesn't matter,' he muttered, calmly, taking the finished article from the lathe and putting it beside the screws, 'all books are the same. It doesn't matter at all. You have books, eh?' I said I had one or two, but I needed them. As a matter of fact, I had only brought one or two engineering works with me and a funny old leather-bound Norie's Navigation of my father's. My mother didn't know whether I'd need it or not. I didn't. I had plenty to do without going into navigation. It was a queer old thing, though, designed for men of the old school who came aft from the fore-castle and had to learn the three Rs. 'You need them, eh? Ah, well, that is all right. I read many books, yes. Plenty English books.' I saw light all at once. 'How much for these?' I asked Mister George. He turned to look at the gauges of the freezing plant and then glanced back at me over his shoulder. 'I care nothing for money,' he said. 'It is the root of evil. But books! Knowledge is power, yes.'

"It was confusing. Here was another victim of words, words he didn't even clearly understand. He lived apparently in a copy-book world, full of shining maxims and idiotic generalities. For an instant I had a queer feeling of talking to one of those automats one sees on the stage—figures with gramophones in their interiors, and who utter strange, disconcerting sounds.

"'I will give you a book,' I said at last, taking up the things, 'and many thanks for these. They said

we couldn't get them made here, but you see they were wrong.'

'He didn't understand a word of this explanation, I believe. He smiled, moved his fez round and round his head as if on a socket, and remarked, 'Yes, you all right now, eh?'

'“Yes,’ I said, patiently, ‘but if you want a book on navigation, mathematics and so on, I can let you have it.’

'He nodded, but I don't think he followed me. So I took my screws and washer, and telling him I would return, hurried back to the ship. You know, I felt triumphant. I had scored, not only over my ship-mates, but over him, over Africa, over the whole of the universe that wasn't Me, myself. I had taken a step forward. It is curious how difficult it is to describe the simplest evolutions of the soul. But I was no longer oppressed by Mister George and his languages. I had accomplished something far beyond the most abstruse philologies—I had got what I wanted.

'And I took him his book, a big obsolete tome bound in hide. He was rapturous, wiping his hands on some waste and opening it upside down. 'Ah, yes, very good, very good!' he said. 'I read plenty English books, yes. Thank you, I am very much obliged. Knowledge is power, eh?' I smiled, I suppose, for he leaned toward me eagerly. 'No? You think not, eh? Ah, when I had the jaundice, I read many books.' He waved his arms to indicate long galleries of libraries. 'Plenty, plenty, books. Oh, yes.' Once again I had the feeling of listening to an

automaton. It seemed so futile talking to such a being. Indeed, that is why I tell you about him. He was my first foreigner. I had always been able to get into some sort of touch with the people I had met. I knew how they lived and loved and thought. But him! He had dressed his mind up in the showy rags and remnants of our speech as a savage will dress his body in incongruous clothing, and of what he was, inside, I could form no conjecture. Between us was an impassable barrier. I was trying to realize what made me so silent before his volubility, when the bell on the forecastle of the *Corydon* struck eight times. It was midnight and my watch was over. I said good-bye. 'I will visit your ship,' said my friend, Mister George. 'I have been on plenty ships. Oh, yes, plenty . . .'

"I ran away at last. I daresay he would have practised his English on me till daybreak if I hadn't run away. I went down and found things all quiet, and then I came up and roused old Croasan. He was lying on the settee and the gin-bottle stood on the chest-of-drawers, empty. He raised himself on his elbow and looked at me gloomily. I was so glad to get back and talk to a real human being, drunk as he was, that I patted him on the shoulder and told him we would have the dynamos fixed up in the morning. He blinked, and fell back exhausted. I hoisted him up again and he looked round resentfully. 'Aren't you going to turn out?' I asked him. 'Come on, Mister.' 'Is she all right?' he growled. 'Yes, of course!' I answered, rashly, and he promptly lay down again and declined to move. I was in a

hole, but not downhearted. I couldn't turn in unless he turned out, you know. I walked along the alleyway with a crazy idea of calling the Chief half formed in my mind. But that seemed to clash with the school-boy code that forbids sneaking. Poor old chap! I thought. And yet I couldn't keep his watch. I had to get my sleep if I was to be any good next day. I went back and lifted him, snoring, to his feet. 'Come on, Mister,' I said, 'it's your watch.' And I heaved him gently through the doorway and along the alleyway. I was nearly carrying him. I don't know what my intention really was, whether I had a notion the outside air would brace him up or whether I was going to tumble him down the engine-room ladder. Anyhow, we were staggering about the dark alleyway when we both fell with a crash against the Chief's door. It was the most effectual thing I could have contrived. There was a growl of 'what's that?' from the Chief and he suddenly sprang out in his pyjamas. Seeing only me, he shouted, 'What you making all this row about?' And then he stumbled over old Croasan. I laughed. I couldn't help it. All the while I was explaining to that indignant Chief how we came to be there I was uttering cries of joy in my heart over the rich humanity of it all. It was sordid and silly and wrong, but it was real. The Chief lit his lamp and I saw his one bright eye and the empty, blood-red socket glittering in the radiance. To think that I had been mad enough to feel sick of the *Corydon*! I felt as if I had suddenly got home again. And, just as suddenly, old Croasan had vanished. I looked at

the Chief in bewilderment. He eyed me solemnly, but without disfavour, and strode along to our cabin. Throwing the empty bottle through the port-hole, he said briefly, 'Get yourself turned in, Mister,' and went back to his own room. I turned in quick, you can imagine. It had been a great day for me. You may think it strange, but I look back at it as one of the happiest in my life. Work! Work! It is the only thing that keeps us sane when we're young. All else is only bladder—nonsense. Work and the knowledge of it, and the planning of it. Work, and its failures, its bitter anxieties, its gleams of inspiration, its mellow accomplishment, and then the blessed oblivion!

"Well, four voyages I made in that old packet, each one worse than the last, I believe—four voyages after nuts, and palm-oil, and enormous square logs of mahogany, and cages of snarling leopards and screaming parrots, and tanks of stealthy serpents. I used to wonder who found it worth while to hire us to bring such bizarre and useless things into England. Once one of the twenty-five hundred weight barrels of palm oil slipped from the slings and fell on the deck with a soft crash. It smashed like an egg, of course. Indeed, as the mess burst and splashed all over everybody on the after-deck, it was not unlike an enormous yolk in its brilliant gamboge colour, with the split and dismembered staves lying radially round it like dirty white of egg. And someone muttered that 'there was twenty quid gone.' The leopards, too, struck me on the homeward trip. Anything less like the traditional wild

beast of the jungle you couldn't imagine. Most of them were mangy and had eye-trouble of some sort. They would stare with a sort of rigid horror and indignation at the dancing blue waves over side for hours, their blank, topaz eye-balls never moving unless you poked with a stick, when the brute would utter a cry of what seemed to me utter despair and settle down once more to keep the ocean under observation.

"We did not always go to the same place. In fact, I saw very little of Mister George. Railheads advance with our sphere of influence. But I stuck it, and put in my year of service for my license. I was saving money and looking forward to a spell in London. All the other people I knew I let go. I realized I had been all the time an alien in that genteel professional world.

"And so, one day, a year after I'd set foot on the deck of that old ship, I said good-bye to the men I'd sailed with and took the train to Paddington. How strange I felt I can't explain. As the cab took me down the familiar streets and I saw the old familiar sights, I felt—well, you'll know when you go back! Something had snapped. I was in it, but not of it. I saw the young men walking in the streets, with their high collars and nice clothes, their newspapers and walking-sticks and gloves. What did they know? I'd been like that, just as ignorant, just as conceited and narrow-minded. And I thought of the *Corydon* and the blue tropic sea!

"I took a room at a hotel and went out to see my

mother. I did this as a duty, mind you. If my brother was there still I had no intention of staying long. There was no room for the two of us in the same house. And of course, I had a great desire to know if they were married. Humph!

"I found my mother living alone. He was gone again! She, Gladys, was gone too. They hadn't been married, not a bit of it. He never had any intention of marrying her. It was very difficult to get the actual story out of my mother. She didn't know much, and she was reluctant to tell me even that. But I found out at last that she, Gladys, had followed him. Nobody knew where. He had given up his agency and started on a tour for some patent tyre company. And she, at the lifting of his finger, had gone after him."

Mr. Carville paused and looked towards a figure coming into view on the path. It was Miss Fraenkel. I looked at my watch. It was twelve o'clock.

"Miss Fraenkel is coming up to lunch," I said to Bill. "Will you join us, Mr. Carville?"

He stood up shaking his head and brushing the tobacco ash from his vest.

"I'll look in afterwards," he said, "but I told the wife I'd be back to dinner."

"Where was she, all the time, Mr. Carville?" asked Bill.

He laughed and stepped down from the porch.

"I will tell you this afternoon," he said, and reached the side-walk as Miss Fraenkel crossed the street. He lifted his hat absently and passed on, and she, pausing for a moment, gave him one of

those swift and searching glances with which her country-women are wont to appraise us. She came on up to us.

"Why didn't you come sooner?" said Bill, "we've been expecting you."

"I've been getting signatures," she replied. "Is that him?"

"Yes. He's coming back after lunch."

"Did you tell him that I want to get his wife to join?"

We were silent. We had forgotten all about Miss Fraenkel's suffrage. She scanned our faces with an eager look in her hazel eyes. I made an effort.

"We thought," I said, "we thought that perhaps you would be able to explain better than we could how——"

"Why, what have you been talking about, then?" she asked.

"We haven't been talking," I replied, looking at the little brass pilgrim on the door. "We've been listening."

And then we went in to lunch.

CHAPTER IX

WE AWAIT DEVELOPMENTS

IF it were necessary to epitomize our attitude towards Mr. Carville during that lunch, it might perhaps be discovered in the word "doubt."

Without accusing him of intentional deception, he had certainly led us to believe that he would explain to us the many points of interest which his previous history had raised. We had felt quite sure that in the course of the morning we should learn of his meeting with his wife and the reasons which led them to make their home in the United States. We expected to have the mystery of the prodigal brother co-ordinated with the painter-cousin's story. We—but of what avail was it to grumble? He had set out to tell his tale in his own way and it was only right that we should permit him to do so.

In one thing I agreed with Bill and differed from Mac—the question of "Gladys."

"So her name's 'Gladys'?" said he, when he had brought Miss Fraenkel's knowledge up to date.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Bill. "Oh, no!"

"He said so," persisted her husband.

"No," I said, "so far he has not mentioned Mrs. Carville."

He came round to our view in the end, when I reminded him of the *scaldino*. Personally, the idea was incredible. When I thought of Mrs. Carville

bending over the brazier, of her dark, noble face with its large tragic eyes, and then of the smart convent-bred miss who was called Gladys—absurd!

Miss Fraenkel remained faithful to her mission throughout the meal, and enlisted our sympathy by recounting the struggles of Mrs. Wederslen to capture the league for her own social purposes. It was an old story, this of the ambition of Mrs. Wederslen. Mrs. Wederslen seemed to think that in a community of artists the art-critic's wife is queen. Mrs. Williams had rebelled against this, and there was tension between them. Mrs. Wederslen had even made the insane experiment of trying to patronize Bill. There had been a meeting, a few words on each side, and the rest was silence. Without any definite verbal information on the point, Mac and I knew that Bill's tongue would be stilled in death ere she would speak charitably of Mrs. Wederslen. And here were Miss Fraenkel's piquant features aglow with a flush of indignation and her hazel eyes aflame with ladylike resentment, because that imperious woman was endeavouring to assert her sovereignty over the league. In the great problems thus raised it seemed likely that the smaller matter of Mrs. Carville's allegiance might be swamped. I endeavoured to bring this discussion into alignment with my own imaginings, a common human weakness.

"But perhaps she's like me, hasn't got a vote," said Bill.

"Well," said Miss Fraenkel, "she may have some day. And anyhow, the great thing is to spread the

light in dark places. We want every woman to know her power. Mrs. Wederslen——”

She began again. Mrs. Wederslen had done the one thing needful to rouse Miss Fraenkel's feelings towards her to the temperature of Bill's: she had expressed her opinion that civil servants should be debarred from political activity. In spite of my efforts, the conversation became sectional. Mac motioned me to join him on the porch for a smoke.

“What do you think?” he said, when he had lighted up.

“The time is past for imaginative forecast,” I replied. “It is obvious that Mr. Carville, having been tremendously interested in his own life, is determined to tell us all about it. Before lunch I hardly knew what to think, but now I feel fairly certain that he will bring us safely to the conclusion.”

“There never is a conclusion to stories in real life,” said he.

“Well, you know what I mean. He'll account for the facts as we see them, anyhow. His wife, his brother, his living here, and so on.”

“And Gladys,” added Mac.

“Ah! I expect we've heard the last of Gladys. She was evidently an early flame, since gone out.” I struck a match.

“I say, old man.”

“What?”

“What a tale his brother could tell, eh?”

“Possibly; but perhaps his brother has not the faculty,” I said.

"No. Here he comes!"

Mr. Carville appeared on the sidewalk, his Derby hat on his head, his corn-cob in his mouth. For a moment he turned, and, looking back, flung out his hand with a gesture expressive of petulance and dismissal towards an invisible person at his door. And then he came towards us sedately, caressing his pipe, eyes on the ground, and seated himself in the Fourth Chair in silence.

"I was wondering," he said at last, "if after all you'd just as soon I didn't tell you all this about myself and got right on to my married life. Eh?"

"Speaking for myself," I said, hastily, "no! Please tell your story as you have it in your mind. Don't edit it. *I'll* do that."

He gave me one of his quick looks and smiled.

"Right!" he said, and shook himself straight in his chair. "I'll get busy. I've got to get the five o'clock train, and the wife—she said she'd have a bit of tea ready for me at four."

He sat at the far end of the verandah, the furled hammock tickling his ears, and he shifted the chair so that he faced north, looking towards his own house. As he opened his mouth to replace his pipe, Bill opened the door and led Miss Fraenkel out to be introduced.

It was a ceremonious bow with which Mr. Carville greeted her as he rose. He did not offer to shake hands, as middle-class people generally do, to their credit. He gave her one square look and then dropped his eyes, and I couldn't detect him even glancing at her again. He seemed to have made a

brief examination and then dismissed her from his memory.

The problem of chairs was instantly solved by Bill. She opened the window and she and Miss Fraenkel sat inside. Mr. Carville studied the toe of his plain serviceable boot while these arrangements were being carried out. He sat motionless in the Fourth Chair, and I could not help feeling that the business of transferring Miss Fraenkel established Mr. Carville's inalienable right to his seat.

"Full speed ahead!" said Mac, jocularly.

"I ought to explain," said Mr. Carville, "that as the years had gone by, my mother and I had ceased to have very much sympathy with each other's way of thinking. We had lived together, as was natural, but we had gradually lost sight of the career my father had outlined for me. And when I had lost my job in Victoria Street, really that was the last link that snapped. I had no fancy for living in Oakleigh Park, especially after what had happened to Gladys. You can understand that.

"Another thing. I had become in a small way an author. Don't imagine that I'm setting up myself with you, sir. Not at all. I understand, I hope, now, the difference between writing a book and being an author. It was this way. To me, breaking into sea-life so sharp and suddenlike, there were many things I noted that most men would never heed. I don't heed them myself now. But then I did. And in port on Sundays, and some-

times at sea when I couldn't sleep on the middle-watch, I'd jot down little thumb-nail sketches, you might call them, of the things I saw. 'Cameos of the Sea,' I'd put on the top. The whole thing wasn't as long as some of the chapters in Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall,' and, to tell you the truth, I had no great opinion of them. I only mention them because of what happened. I had the sheets tied up in brown paper in my sailor-bag.

"Well, I told my mother I wanted to live in London awhile, and as I needed to be within reach of the Board of Trade Offices until I had passed my exam., she saw no good reason for objecting. The next day, as I was walking up the Strand, one of those streets in London that I've never seen anywhere else, I caught sight of an old gateway at the end of a passage. There was a date, 1570 or something as old, on the arch, and as I strolled in I remembered I'd called on an architect who lived there in the old days, when I was in Victoria Street. It was Clifford's Inn. I was looking round at the old houses and wondering if I could hire a room or so there, when a girl came down one of the staircases.

"Well, I didn't recognize her at first. I remember wondering why she jumped back when she caught sight of me. 'Hullo!' I said, 'what are you doing here?' 'I live here,' she said; and sure enough there was her name on the wall, bracketed with another one: *Miss Gladys Sanders and Miss Octavia Flagg*.

"'You!' I said. 'You live here?' She nodded and asked me if I would come up. We went up the

dusty old stairs to the top floor, and she took a key from her purse and opened the door. I felt there was something pretty brazen about all this. This wasn't the sort of thing to appeal to Oakleigh Park, I was quite sure, and said so. 'Oh, I've done with Oakleigh Park,' she said, 'and they've done with me.' And then her friend, Miss Flagg, came in, a thin woman of about thirty-five, with a green dress and rather untidy hair. I said thin, but so was Gladys. It almost seemed to me, when I'd seen them a few times, that there was some fierce fire inside of those women, wearing them thin and showing through. Neither of them was beautiful; they didn't try to be. They just lived for—what do you think? I'll tell you in a minute.

"At first I was all abroad at the sudden meeting. A minute before Gladys came down that staircase, if you'd asked me whether I cared for her I'd have said no; it was all burned up long ago. But now I'd seen her again, thin and sallow and changed as she was, it had all come back with a rush. Do you know that kind of love? It's because of the way it rushes back on you, knocks you down and tramples on you, makes you feel mean and degraded and ashamed, that I pray God it may never happen on me again. I like to think a man may never have it but for one woman. Sometimes, away out East, when I've been drowsing in a hammock listening to the sweat dripping on the deck and watching the blue hills in the distance, it has come upon me. Sometimes in dreams I've seen her face clearer than I ever saw it in life. . . . You know them,

perhaps? . . . Dreams so vivid that one's brain and body ache with the pain of it? Ah!"

He paused and none offered to speak. I sat facing him in some astonishment. There was to me something fundamentally shocking in a man making such a confession. If it had been dark so that the words floated to us invisibly; but in broad day! Perhaps more convincingly than anything else did this impress upon my mind Mr. Carville's deliberate intention to fashion for us a tale from the agony of his life, to give us, with such art as he possessed, a picture of an obscure and alien romance.

"Miss Flagg, it seems, was a journalist, and Gladys—well, she was a journalist too, I suppose. From what she told me I gathered she did translations for different agencies, and earned a little that way. When I told them what I'd come in for, they said there was a flat in Serjeant's Inn just around the corner, which was to be let furnished. I told them I was going in for an exam. and afterwards I was going to take my little papers to a publisher. Miss Flagg lit up like a bonfire at this, and says she, 'I'm a literary agent. Do let me read it; I may be able to place it.'

"I looked at her. To my mind she didn't seem the sort of woman who would understand the things I'd been writing about; old Croasan and the Chief with the glass eye, the firemen and all the rest of them. However, I said I'd let her have it if she liked. Gladys looked at me when I came out as an author. She'd never had any opinion of me, you

see. She liked *clever* people, people with flash and glitter, who could dance and talk with a spatter about everything—like my brother. You can believe I wanted to know why she'd left him, if she'd ever gone to him. I said, 'I thought you were going out when I saw you,' and she took the hint. We went down again and out into the Strand.

"'Is it any use?' I said, and the big Law Courts' clock boomed out over our heads. It sounded like NO in my ears.

"She shook her head. 'Quite impossible,' she said. 'Well, where's Frank?' I asked her.

"She didn't know. He'd dropped her just the same as he dropped anything else he had no use for, without a word. And I think it was shame more than because she didn't care for me that made her say it was impossible. I don't know—what is a woman's pride, anyhow? See how he'd treated her; worse than I'd treat my dog. And yet when he came back, flush with money and with flash friends, and he lifted his hand, she ran to him, *ran!* Explain it if you can. I can't.

"That was later. I got my flat and passed my exam. all right, and my uncle in Fenchurch Street said I could have a job as soon as I liked. But I thought I'd wait a bit. I was seeing London from a fresh angle, you might say; seeing it as an outsider, as an alien. I had about a hundred pounds to spend, and in a modest quiet way I enjoyed myself. The razzle-dazzle of London doesn't appeal to a man much, when he's been on the bend in seaports. Humph!

“And Miss Flagg took my manuscript and went crazy about it. She said she sat up all night to read it. Knowing what I do of women now, I think she was a liar. Besides, anyone could read it in two or three hours. The point is she told the publisher that lie, and he believed it. Her enthusiasm was contagious. He said it was fine, and gave me ten pounds for it. Miss Flagg said it was a generous offer and raked off a sovereign for her commission. I often wonder how authors bear up under such generosity. But of course I know nothing about the business side of it. Only for a short time did I get bitten about the idea of being an author. I found I had nothing to say. Miss Flagg told me she knew a man who ‘did fiction’ at the rate of twenty thousand words a week. She might have lied, but then, how do I know? Anyway, I saw it wasn’t in my line—‘fiction.’

“You see, when I went to their flat and met their literary friends and heard them talking about their work, I felt out of it. I was an alien in their world. I had no interest in the details of book-writing. I’d just put down what happened to come into my mind. I wondered what they wrote about. Love I suppose. I’d sit and look about me and try to imagine what those people would have thought of the old *Corydon’s* engine-room. Humph! Do *you* know what those thin, half-fed men and women thought the most important thing in the world? Not husbands and wives and children, not war, nor even courage; not books nor pictures; nothing of

this. No; they were wearing their souls out clamouring for a *Vote!*”

We sat very still. You could have heard a pin drop.

“There was Gladys. She was only nineteen, and ought to have been helping her mother at home; but no, she was emancipated, as she called it. Her experience with my brother taught her that the *Vote* was necessary. Miss Flagg told me that unless women got the *Vote* England would drop behind. They all said that. To me it was amazing. It showed me how far I’d travelled away from the old ideas. It angered me to see women acting like that, spoiling themselves, making themselves ridiculous and ugly, all for that!

“I’d been home a couple of months, not more, when I began to get restless. My mother asked me why I didn’t get a job on shore. But I couldn’t see myself going to Victoria Street every day, clean collar and umbrella, sitting at a desk dictating silly little letters to silly little people. Those who wanted it let them do it. I went to my uncle and asked for a job. His eyes twinkled when he said, ‘Well, the *Corydon*’s chartered for the Mediterranean, and they want a Second.’

“‘When shall I join?’ I said.

“‘Oh, I was only joking,’ says he. ‘We’ll get you a better ship than that now.’

“‘No,’ I said, ‘I’ll go back to the *Corydon*. I know her and she knows me. When shall I join?’”

Again Mr. Carville paused, and appeared to be lost in thought, oblivious of our presence. An

expression of gentle earnestness had settled upon his face, almost melancholy. I imagined for a moment that he was endeavouring to arrange his thoughts.

"I do hope," he remarked, without looking at us, "I do hope that anything I've said hasn't given offence." He turned to us with a slight smile. "I mix up so little with genteel people nowadays—you see?"

I nodded vaguely, and he relapsed into thought again.

"I was thinking," he observed presently, "as you are so quiet, I might have said something. I remember that was the way they signified dissent, so to speak. And—I wouldn't like to offend—anybody.

"Pray go on," I said. "We are not genteel in that sense of the word."

It was plain that, apart from any scruples concerning our gentility, he had some difficulty in picking up the thread of his story. It was a relief when he began to speak.

"I come now," he said, "to a time that I hardly know how to describe. The next few years, taken together, were my *Wanderjähre*. You know Wilhelm Meister, of course? My apprenticeship was over, but I wasn't a man yet for all that. There's an intermediate stage, what we engineers call being 'an improver,' in a man's life. It seems strange that I should speak of myself so at twenty-seven, but there it is; I was late maturing. Again, I like to think that the Dutch are right when they use

the same word for husband and man. Until he is married a Dutchman is not a 'Man.' That's how I looked at it!

"When I rejoined the *Corydon*, the Chief said the Second was going to stay on one more trip, but old Croasan was clearing out and I could go Third. I wouldn't mention these details, only they are important, because—well, you'll see.

"Old Croasan was going ashore when I joined. Didn't even shake hands with the Chief! I thought he was going home to the bonny Scotland he always shouted about when he was canned, but the Second says, 'Na, na. He'll never go back to Grangemouth,' and Chief says, 'He'll get a job all right, all right.' Well, I was busy enough with my own concerns, and, as usual, there was a-plenty to do on the *Corydon*; but one evening I was up at Cully's Hotel talking to Miss Bevan, when in walks a smart, tidy-looking man of, say, forty-five, and calls for a bottle of Bass. I wouldn't have given him more than a passing glance if he hadn't looked me in the eye. 'Eh, lad,' says he. 'Will ye have a drink?' 'Croasan?' I said. 'Ah, it's me,' says he. 'Ah'm away the morn in yon big turret.'

"I was that astonished I couldn't reply, and he drank up his beer and went out with a wave of the hand. Miss Bevan asked me if I knew him. 'Sure,' I said, 'but he was old and grey three days ago.' It was my first experience of a sea-faker. He'd been up to Cardiff, had a Turkish bath, haircut and shave, and the barber had dyed his hair and moustache. Then he'd gone round to the

offices and eventually got a job. Of course, the first green sea that went over him would add twenty years to his age, but he'd be signed on then. The Chief laughed when I told him. 'And you'll see him in Genoa,' he says; 'yon turret steamer's goin' there too.' I did see him. In a way, he introduced me to my wife."

Mr. Carville paused and struck a match. Bill's head appeared at the window.

"Oh!" she said, "I thought you were never coming to it!"

He proceeded, carefully putting the burnt match on the window-sill and blowing great clouds.

"The run to Genoa from the Tyne," he said, "takes a fortnight. It was during that voyage that I began to see how I stood with regard to Gladys. I suppose you read Ibsen? I used to, on the *Corydon*, and one of the most remarkable of his plays, in my opinion, is *Love's Comedy*. You remember the moral of that play was that a man should never marry a girl he is madly in love with. It sounds wicked if you put it that way, but old Ibsen was right. He knew, as I knew, that a young man may be in love with a girl who is not suited to him. He knew that there isn't much difference between that sort of love and hate. He knew that you can have a contempt for a girl and her ideals and yet love her. That sort of love is like those big thin bowls they showed me in Japan—beautiful, expensive and awful frail—no use at all for domestic purposes. I thought this out on the voyage to Genoa, and put Gladys, so to speak, on a shelf,

where she is now. And as I thought it out, I saw how I stood. I saw I was not only an alien wherever I went, but I was alone. I began to be afraid. I used to look ahead and tried to see myself in twenty years' time, alone. It is not good for a man to be alone. That's how I felt when we reached Genoa.

"Those who know best often say that sailormen know less about foreign countries than many people who have never travelled. I daresay that is true of many of us. It is very likely true of any uneducated people who go abroad. Most men who go to sea have very little education. They have no knowledge of their own country, let alone others. To a certain extent I was different. I had always wanted to see Italy. Years before, when I was in Victoria Street, I had read about her history and art. I had even learned a little of the language. And so, when we came into Genoa, and I saw that beautiful city, with her white palaces and green domes and fort-crowned hills, when I remembered what she'd been, and saw what she was, I could hardly wait till nightfall to go ashore and see it all at once!

"Since then I've been to nearly every port in the Mediterranean, from Gibraltar to Smyrna and from Marseilles to Tunis, but I never experienced anything like that first night ashore in Genoa. The next day the Chief asked me where I'd been, and I told him. 'Why,' he says, 'didn't you go into the "Isle o' Man" or the "American"?' No, I hadn't been in any of those places. He said they'd have to show me round.

“That night I went with them, leaving the new Fourth in charge, and I learned why sailormen know so little of foreign places. All along the Front, as they call it, were scores of dirty little bars with English names. I wouldn’t mention them at all, only it is necessary in a way, as you’ll see. We went into several and had a drink, and the Chief was known in them all. Finally the Chief says, ‘Let’s get on to the “Isle o’ Man,”’ and we went out and walked along the Via Milano a little further. The ‘Isle o’ Man’ was rather bigger than most of these places, and had a very comfortable room with plush settees and marble tables shut off from the main café. It was kept by a big, heavy, red-haired woman, about fifty years old, who came in and sat down by the Chief and talked about old times. I found she was married to a steward in the Hamburg-American Line, who ran this show on the side. It was a mixed company in there, skippers of all nations sitting round and drinking; and a tall young chap, with a velvet coat and long hair, was playing a piano and singing songs. After every song he would come round with a tin saucer and collect pennies from us. I remember thinking how strange he looked. He had a noble face, I should call it; he looked like a gentleman and spoke like one, and there he was, collecting pennies! I was watching him coming round to our table when a girl came in, a tall, dark young girl, with a tray of glasses. ‘Hello!’ says the Chief, ‘that’s not Rosa, is it?’ The old woman nods and says, ‘That’s Rosa all right,

Chief.' And he called out to the girl to come over to us.

"She came at once. 'Here's a friend o' yours, Rosa,' says the old woman, and the girl looks at the Chief and smiles a little. 'Why, she was only so high last time I was here,' says the Chief. 'She has shot up.' 'Yes,' says the old woman, who was called Rebecca, 'she'll be a fine woman one o' these days.'

"They told me about her as we went back to the ship. No one knew who her parents were. She had always been at the 'Isle o' Man,' and sailormen had petted her because she was a nice little thing and would rap out a bit of slang without knowing in the least what it meant. But now, as the Chief said, it was a different matter. She was 'too big to kiss now.' One point in her history I was very interested in, and that was the fact that neither the Chief nor anyone else I ever heard speak of her ever suggested that she wasn't straight. I liked that. There she was, living among all the draggled, dirty seaport crowd, and yet the seafaring men that took their drinks from her believed she was straight.

"I was coming down from the theatre one night about a week later, and I thought I'd look in at the 'Isle o' Man' for a drink before going aboard. There was a good few in there, Greek and Norwegian skippers; and a Belgian engineer was sitting across from me with old Croasan. The piano was going with *Little Dolly Daydream*, *Pride of Idaho*, when in comes Rosa with her tray. To get past

she had to squeeze between old Croasan's table and the piano, and I saw him take hold of her waist. She was hampered by the tray, and he was pulling her down on his knee.

"I don't think it was all gallantry that made me do what I did. I'd never been a whale on that sort of thing. I'm not built on those lines. I think it was a feeling that has always possessed me very strongly when I see an old man with a young woman—disgust. To me it is a horrible sight, the lust of an old man. You can argue as long as you like, but that is one of my fixed eternal prejudices. I feel sick when I see an old man giving way to it. I feel that somehow or other he is debasing humanity. That was the real reason why I jumped up and went over to Croasan.

"He looked up at me as I stood over the table. I could see the crease in his cheeks, the sag under his eyes, and the grey roots of his dyed moustache. He looked up at me as I raised my hand. 'Let her go,' I said, shouting at him above the jangle of the piano, 'let her go, Mr. Croasan.' He was holding her down on his knee.

"'Mind your own affairs!' he says to me, showing his teeth, great dirty yellow fangs; 'Is she yours?' he says. The Belgian engineer sitting near him laughed at this and looked up sneering at me. 'Let her go,' I said again. 'Rosa's a friend of mine,' says he, still holding her. Just then I saw Rebecca's head over the piano, and as I looked down again I saw a peculiar expression on Rosa's face. Her eyes were on me and she seemed to be

thinking 'What are you waiting for?' It all happened, you know, in two or three seconds. I waited no more. I put the flat of my hand across Croasan's mouth, hard. He jerked back to avoid it, and the tray that Rosa was trying to set down on the table, so that she could get at him with her nails, went all over him. The old woman came round the piano and saw him. Croasan started up and I hit him again, and he fell over the Belgian.

"At first I thought I was in for a big row. But Croasan had more experience than I had. He'd been in rows before. When he started up it was not to hit me, but to get out. He crawled under the table between the Belgian's legs and ran to the door. The others were crowding all round me, arguing and shouting. The young chap at the piano was standing up and looking over the top, and Rebecca was trying to calm them. 'Easy, gentlemen!' she kept on calling. Rosa had disappeared. Then the Belgian jumped up and shouted, 'Ee interfere wis my frien'!' pointing at me, and marching out.

"When we got quiet again I began to explain to Rebecca what had happened. Do you know, I thought that was the real danger. I thought she would be the one to get on to me for interfering. Rebecca was a woman who looked more evil than she really was. She sat down at my table, and while I told her and the piano jangled away again, she kept patting my arm and saying, 'Yes, yes, I know.' What did she know? Why, the simple fact that Rosa was no longer a little girl to be

petted, but a grown-up girl to be insulted. I learned a similar thing had happened once or twice in the last few months. You see, the girl was neither in one class nor the other. A young Genoese will not look at a girl who lives in those houses along the Front. He thinks they are all rotten bad. As for the foreigners she met in the 'Isle o' Man,' I needn't tell you what an average Englishman thinks of foreign women.

"I told the Chief about it next day, and he looked up sharp from his plate when I mentioned Croasan. He said hard things of Croasan. 'Think of that?' says he. 'An old chap wi' married daughters!' 'Huh!' says the Second. 'They're aye the wurrst'. But I'm glad ye punched him, mister,' he says. 'Many a time I'd ha' done the same, only we were on articles. Rosa, too!'

"'Ay,' says the Chief, 'but Rosa'll have to put up with men clawin' her now.'

"It was my intention, to avoid trouble and talk, to keep away from the 'Isle o' Man' for the future, but it turned out otherwise. I'd got leave from the Chief on Thursday afternoon to go up to the Cathedral of San Lorenzo to see the Holy Grail. They keep it in the Treasury there and show it on Thursdays for a franc. Most Englishmen laugh at these tales of the Church, and even Catholics I have met tell me they don't believe in miracles. I don't know why; I'm interested in them. Sometimes I get a glimpse of the state of mind in which they are reasonable and necessary things. The more we learn the less we know. They say that saints,

because they led good lives and kept away from evil, were able to perform miracles. Why should a statement like that annoy anybody? Good is a power and evil is a power. Why deny it? I read a book the other day in which the author, a German with a name like a lady's sneeze, denies the existence of good and evil. Humph! It's a long time since I read Hegel, but I don't think he was ever as mad as that!

"I was coming through the church after quitting the sacristan, when I caught sight of a girl kneeling on the steps of the Chapel of St. John. I suppose you know that the Precursor is buried in this church? They show you a silver box with a chain round it, the chain that bound him in prison. There were other women in the church, but this girl was not in the chapel, only kneeling on the step outside. Women, you see, are not allowed to enter that chapel; on account of Salome, I suppose. I saw this girl kneeling on the step and crossed over to see what she was doing. It was Rosa, saying her prayers. There is a difference between a Catholic and a Protestant praying. You may have noticed it. A Protestant shuts his eyes and thinks hard about the money he's making or the automobile he's going to buy. A Catholic plays about with his beads and chatters all the time while he's thinking of religion. Protestants are scandalized when they see how Catholics make a sort of rough-house playground of their churches—children playing on the floor during service even. They can't understand how Catholics manage to reverence a thing and yet

not hate it. Englishmen always draw wrong conclusions about an Italian's relations with God. You see, most Englishmen feel about God as they used to feel about Queen Victoria. They respected her and felt she was necessary, but all the same they felt exasperated with her for being so particular at times! Humph!

"Well, Rosa looked up and recognized me, smiled and went on praying as fast as she could. I bowed. Of course I had my hat in my hand, so I had to bow. I saw her go red, and I thought I'd done something she disapproved of. I stood there hardly knowing what to do, and she bent her head to finish her prayer. She told me afterwards that it was the first time anyone had ever bowed to her. She turned red because she thought I was mocking her, and then, I suppose, with pleasure. That was the beginning of our courtship.

"Of course, in one sense, it was an unusual courtship. It happened to come about by a number of accidents. If I hadn't hit old Croasan she would never have looked at me, for I'm not a very conspicuous figure at any time. If I hadn't met her in the church just as she was praying for my soul, because I'd acted kindly towards her, I might never have seen her again. And so on, if—if—if. It was in that sense unusual. But in another sense I don't suppose there was ever a more commonplace affair than this of Rosa and me. If we'd lived in Brixton we couldn't have been more respectable!

"For some mysterious reason or other Rebecca

took a fancy to me. Mind, I was only third engineer of the oldest tramp in Genoa. If I'd been Chief, then I could have understood her making a fuss of me. But I was Third. I have an idea Rebecca had seen better days. Now and again she dropped hints that pointed that way. She had a manner too, when she was sober, and had been cleaned up. The men who drank in her bar little knew how she was transformed when she dressed herself to go up town. They little knew, either, how very like the house upstairs was to houses in Brixton or Hartlepool or the Paisley Road. Middle-class people are the same all the world over. I expect they have fringes on their curtains even in Honolulu! Rebecca had, anyhow.

"The news made a bit of stir among the ships for a while as might be expected, and gradually spread right through the Merchant Service. 'Rosa of Rebecca's was engaged to the Third of the *Corydon!*' By George, that *was* a morsel of gossip. Miss Bevan had heard about it in Barry; Polly Loo in Singapore heard it, the girls in the Little Wooden Hut at Las Palmas heard it. It went round the world, that Rosa of Rebecca's was engaged.

"For three years we traded as regularly as a mail boat to Genoa with coal, then across to Cartagena in Spain for iron ore and back to the Tyne. I was Second, of course, and I passed for Chief when my time was all in, just taking a few days off to go to Shields for the examination. I might have got another ship, but I was pretty comfortable by now. I knew my Chief and my engines, and I

naturally wanted to keep on the Genoa trade as long as I could. In those days they took weeks to discharge, and so I used to have quite a spell with Rosa. She was never bothered with 'men clawin' her,' as the Chief expressed it. I used to take her up to the Giardino D'Italia to listen to the band and to see the movies, or we'd take the Funicular up to Castellaccio and have a bit of dinner at a little trattoria near the Righi, where you can look out across the sea. I learned to speak the language pretty well, and it was my intention at first to settle in Italy. But Rosa would not hear of it. She wanted to get away from the associations of her childhood.

"Perhaps it was because of this desire of hers that we so often went up and sat on the bastions of Castellaccio and looked out across the sea. And it was here, one evening, that I spoke of a matter which had been in my mind for some little time. We'd had Christmas together that year, and it was a clear, cold, windless afternoon in January that we rode up out of the city noise, and looked over the roofs and domes and hanging gardens, and saw the orange trees heavy with snow, and the ripe fruit glowing like globes of fire on the laden branches. You must not think that the romantic surroundings had inflamed my imagination, and that I was apprehensive of a lurid story. Not at all. I had turned the matter over, in my prosaic way, for several voyages, and I put the question to Rosa in a direct and simple form. I asked her who she was. It is all very well, in novels, for shy danisels

to run into the arms of some casual Prince Charming, or for heroic clean-cut young college-men with over-developed jaw-bones to marry strange girls for, I suppose, heroic reasons. All very well in novels. But you try that sort of thing in real life, and see where you land. I don't mean externals—parents, social sets or legal tarradiddles. Such things are very slight obstacles. I mean the tremendous obstacles inside you: the mass of your inherited shrinkings and shynesses and delicacy; a whole quick-set hedge of brambles and nettles and thistles, behind which your naked soul is hiding in a sort of terror; and you can't do it! I was in that position, because, so far, Rosa had made no reference to her birth except to say that, although Rebecca wasn't her mother, she was as good as one.

“And Rebecca, when I had mentioned the matter to her one day, had said, with her chin resting on her knuckles, ‘Ask Rosa.’ I said,

“‘Ask her what?’

“‘Ask her if she wants you to know all about it.’

“‘Why,’ I said, ‘is there so much to know?’

“‘Little enough,’ said she, ‘but Rosa made Oscar and me promise to say nothing unless she gave us the word.’

“‘So Oscar knows it as well,’ I said. Oscar was the steward Rebecca had married a few years before, a Dutchman, who was nearly always at sea when I was in Genoa, so I saw very little of him.

“‘Of course, Oscar knows,’ said Rebecca. ‘He knows a good deal of it first hand.’

“‘All right, I'll speak to Rosa,’ I said.

"And I did, as I was telling you. I asked her who she was.

"'You have a good right to know,' she said, looking up to where a sentry's head and bayonet were sliding to and fro above the wall. 'I have meant to tell you, but I know very little. So little!'

"I said I left the matter in her hands entirely.

"The sentry stopped above us, presented arms, grounded, looked round, and then took a peep at us over the corner. A pair of lovers! His yellow, livid face cracked a smile as I caught his eye. For another second or so we grinned at each other, and then he put on his professional mask again, as though he had drawn down a vizor, shouldered his rifle and thumped along his little gangway. Rosa waited until he had passed the further turret and then turned to me.

"'It isn't easy to say it, though, after all,' she said. 'I was a little baby at Aunt Rebecca's, then a little girl and now a big girl. Before that, there was my mother who was dead. My father, dead too, a soldier like him'—she nodded towards the head and bayonet sliding backwards and forwards—'in Abyssinia, you know.'

"'Ah!' I said. 'Yes. But why don't you know your——' Rosa interrupted me.

"'That is just it,' she said. 'Now you come to it. I can't tell you all about it. I don't know the words. There are people in Genova who know. Uncle Oscar knows. He can tell you . . . if you ask him.'

"Now it was perfectly obvious to me that my girl was not trying to hide some shameful secret

from me, but rather that, her speech in our tongue running for the most part on the material details of life, she simply hadn't the words, as she put it, to relate a story in a higher key. I own I was interested, because it was a point which had struck me very much in the study of languages. You must have noticed how you can go along smoothly enough, learning vocabularies, verbs, adjectives, idioms, and so on, reading newspapers and books, filling in what you don't know with a guess or a skip, asking for things at the table, giving orders to a tailor or a barber; and when anybody asks you if you know that language, you say yes, and I suppose you are justified in a way. But just try to express the fundamental and secret things of your life, something that has happened, not in a book, but in your own soul, and see how ragged and beggarly your vocabulary is! The fact is, you don't often speak of these things in any language, let alone a foreign one. Rosa was never talkative. She could be silent without being sullen. Ours, you may say, was for the most part a silent courtship.

"Well, I did what she suggested. By good chance Oscar Hank's ship, the *Prinz Karl*, was due in from New York at the time, and when I saw her two big yellow funnels and top-heavy passenger decks blocking the view of the *Principe*, I went over. Mr. Hank, *Signore* Hank, was a man who had seen the best of his life before he married Rebecca. He was a tall, spare-ribbed man with high shoulders and thin hair brushed across an ivory patch of bald scalp.

His face was strong enough, but worn. He had prominent eyes and sharp cheek-bones accentuated by the hollows in his cheeks, and a sharp, thin nose jutted out over one of those heavy grey moustaches that get into the soup and make the owner look like a hungry walrus. He might have been rich, as they said he was, and he might have been clever in days gone by; but as I knew him he was a faded, soiled ghost of a man, a man preoccupied with the dirty pickings of life, just as his wife, strong character as I knew her to be, was only a drunken parody of her real self, a shrewd, calculating, good-hearted, bad-principled old failure.

“Mr. Hank sat in his cabin, talking to a young fellow in American clothes and French boots, who was, I could see, one of those shady characters who tout for ship-chandlers, whose business makes them toadies, sycophants and pandars. There is something detestable about the ship-chandlery trade, somehow. You see them lick-spittling the old man, taking him ashore if he is a stranger, bringing boxes of candy for his wife if he has her on board, sending a boat every day, for his convenience, and so on, and then, when the ship’s stores are rushed on board at the last moment, and you put to sea, the stuff turns out to be bad or short. The flour is damp and won’t rise, the potatoes are a scratch lot, the meat poor and the fruit rotten. And the Old Man says nothing, the steward says nothing, because they’ve been squared, and after all it’s only the crew who really suffer, because the captain has his own private stock, which Mister steward shares, you

may be sure. It is a dirty business and the sight of those sleek, cunning, pimple-faced young men, in their fancy vests and dirty cuffs, always sickens me, because I know the knavery in their hearts.

“‘Come in, come in,’ said Mr. Hank, as I turned away from his door.

“‘No,’ I said. ‘I’ll wait till you are through, Mr. Hank.’

“‘Nonsense, come in,’ said he. ‘This is only Mr. Sachs, representing Babbolini’s. He won’t eat you,’ he said.

“‘I came back at this, and stood at the door to let a crowd of bedroom stewards with sheets go by. ‘It would take a better man than him to eat me, Mr. Hank.’

“‘Mr. Sachs smiled politely and made room for me on the settee, evidently having no cannibal intentions at the time, or at any rate disguising them. Offered me a cigarette, which I never smoke. Said it was a fine day.

“‘It was a private matter I wanted to speak about,’ I said to Hank, who looked at me with an expression of eternal anxiety in his prominent eyes.

“‘I know,’ he said. ‘I know. I was ashore this morning.’

“‘We won’t discuss it here, Mr. Hank,’ I said, hastily. ‘If you don’t mind, I’ll see you ashore, since you’re busy.’

“‘Mr. Hank, *Signore* Hank, was a man I would never be very intimate with, however well I knew him. I’m not saying he was so bad, or that I was so virtuous myself, at all. It was simply, I suppose, a

matter of temperament. To me it always seemed as though he had so many mysterious things in his mind that he was borne down by them; that the outward and visible world, in which I saw him and spoke to him, was only a thin mask behind which his real existence was concealed. I may have been wrong. It doesn't matter, for *Signore* Hank is dead now, his long life of ingenious speculation is over, and the good and the ill of it, we'll hope, have balanced, anyway. But I couldn't possibly discuss Rosa with *him*, let alone have that smooth, dissipated little bounder of a Sachs sit by and hear it all. I had to call a halt. I was making up my mind to leave the mud alone and not stir it up at all, when Mr. Hank, sitting asprawl in his swivel chair at his roll-top desk, his big chin and nose and moustache buried in his hand, and staring at me with his hard-boiled eyes, remarked abruptly:

“‘Do you know the Hotel Robinson?’

“‘Certainly,’ I said. ‘What about it?’

“‘What you want to do is to go to the Hotel Robinson and ask for Doctor West. He's the man. He'll tell you all about it. You know Doctor West? Tall, big black beard, pale face. Flag's letter P. You know him?’

“‘I've seen him some time or other, I dare say,’ I said. ‘Hotel Robinson, you say. All right and thank you.’

“‘Just a minute,’ sang out little Sachs as I made to go. ‘I'll go with you. I know Doctor West. I'll introduce you.’ And he went on discussing a paper he had, with Mr. Hank.

"I felt a little indignant and walked off, walked in the wrong direction, of course, and lost myself in interminable alleyways of passenger-cabins, hustled by stewards and stewardesses who were polishing brass-work, rolling up carpets, washing floors and so on. All about was that curious odour that seems inseparable from the corridors of steamers, hospitals, workhouses and the like—an odour which is a compound of cleanliness, antiseptic and cold enamelled iron. Such surroundings depressed me. I felt, more acutely than ever before, the distance between Rosa's environment and what I would have had it. I felt dissatisfied with *Signore* Hank, and with myself too, if the truth be told. I had not taken hold of the situation. I had allowed him to impose on me. I suppose you have had the experience, when someone for whom you have no esteem, imposes his pinchbeck personality upon you. Save for the story which this Doctor West of the Hotel Robinson might spin, I would have gone back to the *Corydon* and forgotten it. I wandered about a good bit, when a bell-hop showed me an unexpected way out, and there was Mister Sachs at the gangway, looking about for me.

"'Why, where 'ave you been?' he asked. 'I thought you'd gone.'

"'Well, you needn't bother to wait if you're in a hurry,' I answered, testily, going down the shrouded gangway.

"'Oh, that's not what I meant,' he said, coming after me smartly, buttoning up his coat and taking out his gloves. 'Fact is, Mister,' he went on, 'I'd

take it as a favour—this is the quickest way up to Hotel Robinson—if you'd give me an introduction to your captain.'

"I looked at him astounded, all at sea.

"*'Representing Babbolini's,'* he added, feeling in his pocket for a card. *'Course, any business done's between ourselves. We have a big connection and can always give satisfaction.'*

"So you see how the mere contact of these people contaminates. He was trying to make me his tout to the *Corydon*, me, the once future Prime Minister of England, the child of many prayers! You may say, how were the mighty fallen! Indeed, I was ashamed. I said nothing.

"*'Of course,'* said little Sachs, his pimpled, dough-coloured face close to mine. *'Of course, if you don't care to speak to the Captain, the Chief Steward . . .'*

"There was a trolley car station just outside the gates of the Dogana, and I halted there and said to him:

"*'Look here, don't you worry to come any farther with me. You've got business to attend to, I dare say. Run right along and attend to it. Good morning.'*

"I was none the better for this encounter when I finally reached the Hotel Robinson and stood in an entrance-hall that was high and dark and as cold as an ice box. I felt humiliated as well as depressed. They say people take a man at his own valuation. People don't. They average their own experience, and the answer is never very high.

"The Hotel Robinson was one of those rather shabby, half-hotel, half-pension affairs which seem to hang on year after year with any visible means of support. I say 'seem.' As a matter of fact it was a steady, prosperous establishment with a steady, prosperous connection. It never advertised, never cleaned up, nor modernized, nor did anything, as far as I could ever see, except exist and prosper. I don't know who owned it—Robinson perhaps—whether it was a company, or anything else about it. I had stayed in it once or twice, and a four-poster bed in a sort of giant crypt, with plenty of comfort so long as you didn't step on the flags in your bare feet, a quiet, well-cooked breakfast, and moderate charges were my chief memories of the establishment. *You* would never find it if you went to Genoa. You and other tourists would be in the Bristol or the Savoy or the Miramare up on the heights above the railroad terminal. You would never find the Hotel Robinsons of Europe. They are like a mirage to the tourists, those quiet, clean, cheap hotels. You hear of them and perhaps catch a glimpse of them in the distance, and you press on, and find they have vanished. They have become dear, and noisy, and flashy, and are waiting for you at the station with a brand-new motor omnibus! Humph!

"A woman came out of a little glazed office, a woman dressed in black plush, as it seemed to me, with list slippers on her feet and a mangy old fur wrap over her arms and across the small of her back. Perhaps it was the unusual state of mind I was in; but to me she had the appearance of a

discontented Sibyl, a Sibyl who had been waiting for years for somebody to make an offer for her books. Nobody, apparently, had ever come, and she had to put up with me, who only wanted Doctor West. I was just asking about him when we tumbled back into the Twentieth Century. The telephone bell rang in the office.

"The Hotel Robinson had once been a palace, a marble palace with marble walls a couple of feet thick and staircases like a stonecutter's nightmare. The place was feudal. A coat-of-arms and a hat, in marble, still balanced themselves over the portico—Robinson's perhaps. I suppose the little glazed office was the sentry-box in the old days, where mendicants got their doles and tall freelances from Germany applied for a situation. May be. I looked through the glass partition and saw the woman bending forward, the telephone to her ear, her hand held out over a little charcoal brazier, her lips moving inaudibly, her eyes nearly closed, as though she were weaving a spell.

"I was beginning to feel cold when she rang off and came out again. 'Doctor West? I've just spoken to him,' she said. 'He is at his office in the harbour. He returns at eleven.'

"'I want to see him on a private matter,' I said.

"'To consult him?' she queried.

"'Not professionally, you understand, *signora*, but on a personal affair.'

"'Then come in the evening. He dines at seven. He is always in until ten. Will you leave your name?'

"I left my card and wrote on the back of it that I wished to see him about the relatives of Signorina Rosa Cairola. The woman read it, looked at me, shivered, murmured 'All right,' and went back to her brazier in the office.

"It was more cheerful in that marble tunnel in the evening. There were lights and people about. Not many, but enough to make the place less like a tomb. Perhaps the gloom of the morning was in myself. The Sibyl had put a flower in her hair by way of evening dress and was ordering servants about. I have often wondered who exactly she was. It is the fate of us who wander over the earth to leave so many by-ways unexplored. We can only glimpse and conjecture and, generally, forget. Life for us is like a walk along the broad, modern streets of an Italian city. Every little while we pass narrow alleys, mere slots in the mass of marble architecture, which dive down into darkness and mystery. Every little while we pass low-lying ramps and odd little causeways, where lighted windows give one sudden vivid pictures of heads and faces and arms, sudden snatches of gesture and conversation flung out at us as we pass. We want—I want—to investigate them all, to see what's round the corner, as they say. And we can't. We've got to go on to our destinations, and try and find our fun when we get there. But it wasn't just the vague, generalized appetite for odd characters which made me contemplate that fusty manageress with interest. It was the sudden fleeting reflection that, but for me, but for a chance accident, there was Rosa in

years to come, faded, obscure, efficient, querulous and a failure. And in Hank I saw myself in years to come, only not so successful, not so rich, not quite so shady, I hope. I watched her moving about in her funereal draperies, the flower flopping as she shuffled and gesticulated. Presently she saw me and beckoned, and then I was shown up those ponderous stone stairs, the marble balustrade covered with red-baize for fear people might be frozen to it on the way, no doubt. A pair of vast double doors bore a microscopic inscription of the Doctor's name, together with an almost invisible pimple that was the bell, and before those sombre and enigmatic portals I was left to my fate. For once in a way, I was going to see what was round the corner.

"One leaf of the door opened and remained so for a second before a head appeared, a head of grey, upstanding hair and a dark, bushy beard. You don't often meet with doors that open in that fashion at home. You know the English fashion—six inches and a face peering at you suspiciously, or a wide fling open and the servant standing right up to you and blocking the way with a paralyzing stare. On the continent there is the porter below and the door opens to let you in, not just to see what you want. So in I walked, the door closed and I found myself in the ante-room of Doctor West's apartment, faced by Doctor West himself, and watched by a mummy-case standing close to the wall, a mummy-case painted with a strange, anxious face. Its gold eyes had luminous whites and strong black brows. That bizarre curiosity was the key of the Doctor's fur-

nishing scheme, and it had for me another significance. I knew then that I had heard of him with some certainty. I connected him at last with various stories I had vaguely picked up, snatches of conversation on the bridge-deck or in the mess-room. I recalled the Chief telling me once of some doctor who had come, years ago, to stay at some hotel and who had never left it since except to spend a month every year in Egypt. Great student of mummies, the Chief said. Yes, I remembered it all. Perhaps, if I had not had Rosa, I might have fastened more securely to the story in the first place. Now Rosa had brought me to him. I told him who I was. He nodded and showed me into his front room.

“It is difficult to convey the sense of overwhelming vastness which oppresses men in such chambers. You might not feel it so. My quarters are limited, as you may imagine. Even a millionaire-passenger gets no more than a cottager ashore. And Rebecca’s place had small rooms full of plush furniture and ship-models in bottles and catamarans in glass-cases, assegais and Japanese junk. Ugly and comfortable. But this room of Doctor West’s was terrifying to me. I couldn’t see the ceiling at all save that, just above where his reading lamp glowed green on an immense table, there floated some far-off drapery and a plunging knee—a fresco lost in the gloom. The walls were painted, on stucco, into panels and each panel had a bunch of flowers tied with interminable ribbons in the centre. You don’t like that sort of thing? Well, it is indigenous there, anyway,

and you can't put shiny dadoes and humorous borders on a forty-foot wall, can you?

"And yet, you know, I saw in a moment, before I had opened my mouth, what lay at the back of all this. I could see that was only a variation of the traditional hermit's cave, a modern hole in a marble cliff. This tall, high-shouldered man with his spade-shaped beard and ragged smoking jacket, the cotton wool oozing from the quilting and the pockets burst at the corners, had recluse written all over him. He walked over the half dozen rugs that lay between the door and his encampment behind the table and left me forlorn, twiddling my hat and pulling at my coat, somewhere in outer darkness. He was nervous, yet anxious to show he was at ease. I had disturbed him. Once he looked behind him at a door with a black curtain before it, as though he contemplated flight to his bed-room. Suddenly he started off on a journey into the darkness and returned with a chair, a gilt thing with a rounded knob of upholstery for a seat. And he asked me gently to sit down.

"A recluse! I had that idea in my mind all the time I was telling him my story, as I am telling it to you, as far as it concerned my girl, and I watched him with a certain abstract curiosity, as well as a very lively anxiety. For I couldn't think how he came into it. In rapid succession I thought of the possibilities. In a novel, no doubt, he would be her father or a wicked uncle. Or perhaps he had, in a professional capacity, we may say, concocted some villainy! But then his flag wouldn't be P or any other letter. Villains don't carry on the humdrum

business of attending ships in port for a lump sum down. Yes, as I told him my story I was wondering what his was. And I was conscious also that I was increasing my experience. Here was a recluse. They do not grow on bushes. It stands to reason a young man will not come across many. A young man grows so accustomed to reading about things nowadays that he may quite possibly never miss the actual experience. I could not do that. I have always had some sort of touchstone by which I could keep a hold on the difference between reality and mere imagination. There were many things, common things if you like, which I had never experienced, and I meant to experience them. Nothing dismayed me. I had in me at that time a singular passion for life. No doubt this showed in my face, as I have seen it in others—a thirsty look, with a rather over-confident manner. And Doctor West seemed almost to draw back from me as though I were dangerous, explosive. I dare say I was to him. He had left all that, had sunk into a sort of intellectual torpor, insulated, as one may say, from the great dynamoes of human life.

“‘But why,’ he repeated, after looking at me nervously for a long time and listening to my words. ‘Why do you wish to marry her?’

“‘Well,’ I said, ‘I suppose it’s because we are in love.’

“‘But do you realize the risks?’ he asked gently, moving his papers and books about. ‘I’m assuming, of course, that you are a gentleman,’ he went on. ‘Always best to marry in one’s own class, don’t you

think?' He studied my card for a while and looked up suddenly.

"'But suppose I've considered all that,' I suggested. 'Suppose it isn't so easy to know one's class, as you call it.'

"'Oh,' said he, getting up and walking off into the darkness. 'Oh, if one is a gentleman . . . ' His voice tailed off.

"'But,' I persisted, 'I'm not sure I *am* a gentleman. Really I'm not.'

"'What!' The solitary word came to me out of the shadows with startling distinctness. I nodded. I sat there on that spindley, gim-crack chair and stared contemptuously at the paraphernalia of learning and refinement on the great table, at the silver cigarette box, the bronze inkstand, the sphinxes and scarabs and cenotaphs, the bits of papyrus under glass, the books and magnifying glasses. Stared at them and defied them. I nodded.

"'It is a fact,' I said. 'I have been brought up in a genteel position and I don't consider the whole business to amount to a heap of beans.'

"I could hear him walking to and fro, and presently, as my eyes grew accustomed, I made him out, a tall phantom moving in front of other motionless phantoms. I became aware, too, of a warmth coming from that quarter and saw him stoop and open the damper of a closed stove, a studio stove, I think it was.

"'Then what can it matter to you what her parents were?' he demanded, straightening up and coming into the light.

“‘I didn’t say I wasn’t respectable,’ I told him, ‘as well as curious. Anybody would be that.’

“‘He admitted that was so, and came and sat down.

“‘The girl was born at sea, on a ship,’ he observed slowly.

“‘Well,’ I said, ‘what of that? So was I.’

“‘Oh, is that so?’ He looked at me again in his nervous way. Lit a cigarette and contemplated the smoke.

“‘Born at sea, on a ship,’ he repeated. ‘Her mother came from somewhere up the Adriatic coast, Loreto, if I remember rightly. A lady’s maid. She and her mistress joined the mail-boat at Port Said. They had been living at Cairo. On the voyage she died in giving birth to a child. There was some trouble, which I never fathomed, about the mistress, the Honourable Mrs. James. She did not know her maid was married when she engaged her at Venice. Letters were found in her pockets from a Sergeant Cairola. Just about this time the Italian Army was severely defeated in Abyssinia, and as far as could be ascertained the sergeant, who had married the girl at Ancona on the very point of embarking, was killed. Mrs. James was not in a condition, nor was she, I imagine, of a temperament to interest herself in the case. The girl, of course, was buried at sea, several days before we arrived here. As the vessel was British, the disposal of an Italian child was complicated. Not born on Italian soil, she was not eligible for the state institutions for orphans. I really forget the details. I had to make a declara-

tion, of course, being the surgeon, but the captain and purser saw the authorities. On our return voyage we learned that they had found foster parents for the child, who received a grant out of the pension due to the widow had she lived. Since then, on only one occasion, a very painful one for me, I may say, have I had anything to do with the case.'

"So that I was really no forrader than before, you see. Rosa herself had told me about all of importance that was known. She had been a baby at Rebecca's, then a little girl and then a big girl. And the story, though Rosa had no part in it, the story spread. I had seen around the corner, and there were so many things I wanted to know! Things I had no right to know, come to that, if I was a gentleman. No right to ask anyway. I got up to go.

"'Thank you, doctor,' I said. 'I suppose I'll have to be satisfied with what you've given me. It won't make any difference to us, I'm glad to say. But I should have thought you would have been interested in the case, even if Mrs. James wasn't.' He shrugged his shoulders and moved his papers about, plainly anxious for me to be gone.

"'Remember, I did not settle here until some time had elapsed. I should have forgotten the whole affair but for the occasion I spoke of.'

"'I see,' I said. 'Well, good-night and thank you.'

"'Good-night,' he said nervously. 'Excuse me if I don't go down with you. I am rather busy.'

"'Literary work, I presume?' I said politely, and he nodded.

“‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘I’m engaged on the Book of the Dead. I go to Egypt every year—next month, in fact—and I am behind in my notes.’

“I stood with my hand on the door, looking across the great chamber, and saw him hastily picking up the threads my intrusion had broken. All around the vague walls stood the painted mummy-cases of the dead, like sentinels, watching him with their brilliant, unwinking, expectant eyes. On a shelf close to me stood cats in dissipated attitudes, mere yellow bundles of swathings and fustiness. On trestles behind the door was a long packing case containing a slender shape. There was no casing here, no painted visage, only a vague impression. The sharp frontal bones had shorn clean through the rotted fabrics and I could see the snarling teeth. The small head seemed thrown back, the eyes closed, in enjoyment of some frightful joke. I looked back again and saw him writing, his head in his left hand, writing, no doubt, something in the Book of the Dead.

“Curious, wasn’t it? Curious, I mean, the sort of people who had crossed one another’s paths at the moment of my girl’s coming so forlornly into the world? I was taken with the grimness of it. I was obsessed with the Book of the Dead. It seemed to me shocking that a man, cultivated, well-to-do apparently, with good health into the bargain, should be absorbed in so crazy a hobby. And the English woman, the honourable creature whose temperament unfitted her to take any interest in an orphan whose mother had died in her service and whose father had

perished on the field of battle. Impossible, say you. It isn't at all impossible. Rich people—I mean the rich who are forever rushing about the world or hiding in Mediterranean villas or in yachts on the Dalmatian coast—are very curious people. The very nature of their mode of existence makes them monsters of selfishness. They are the logical outcome of our predatory social system. They are like the insects which we are told will some day triumph over other forms of life. At least, I think of them as such when I encounter them rushing thither and yon over the face of the earth, crawling up mountains and flying through the air, their shiny wing-cases flashing in the sun and the sound of their progress making a buzz in the newspapers. Well! as I said, it was curious. Curious I should have found my girl in such surroundings, growing there like a straight, healthy plant, just blooming in a bed among all those old decayed and discarded people of the world. Curious, too, I thought, that these people, like old Croasan, had rejected life. Though they were, if anything, less estimable than he was, for he defied life, in his silly, senile, drunken way, while they seemed simply scared of it.

“But we weren't. We had, you may say, nothing in common, but we were not afraid of life, and that is the great thing. To me it was wonderful, the experience of courage and curiosity, because I had been brought up to shrink from contact with reality, to keep myself unspotted from the world. It may be, therefore, that I am only describing to you perfectly normal emotions. It may be that I had

profited nothing by my long probation. It may be: I cannot tell. I am not a believer in a vicarious existence, living by proxy and tallying each minute, each crisis, by something in a book. Nobody could love literature more than I; but I am sure at the same time that, while life may chance to be literature, literature is not life. It can't be. There was the doctor with his Book of the Dead. Do I judge him? Not I. It may be he was a great genius who will be immortal as we count immortality. To him I was, possibly, a mere annoyance, an impertinent interlude in his entrancing studies of his mouldy mummies, indecorously calling his attention to the existence of a modern effete civilization. I don't know. I never took the trouble to find out. He never materialized again. He moved back into the shadows; a name, tall, pale and with a black beard, passing in his little launch, at the call of the code-flag P.

"Well, there it was, a vague and inconclusive episode, like so many others in my life. So many, in fact, that as I look back at it all, if it were not just for Rosa and the children, the sum-total of life for me would be futility. When I read biography, and I have read a good deal of it, I reflect upon the achievements of men, their loves and hates, their steady ambitions hacking away at obstacles until victory is in sight and the guerdon won, or their glorious deaths in action and the fullness of their posthumous fame, and I—I doubt. There is a tinge of theatricality about it all. I doubt. It is not so much that I regret my own failure to copy their

example, but rather that the stories don't tally with my own experience. Often, when I tire of a novel, I ask myself why? And the answer is, This isn't the way at all! People aren't *like* that. Love isn't like that either. While as for hate, there is very little of it in the world, I fancy, but rather ill-temper and selfishness and indifference. These make for futility, just as our uncertainty of ambition does. We grope.

"You may imagine that I was not justified in saying in so many words that I was no gentleman, that I was prejudicing myself in that man's eyes, wantonly. I don't defend it altogether. I was eager at the time, full of the radical philosophy of the period, anxious to stand on my own feet. I saw men in the flat, so to speak. Men *and* women. They were decorative forms rather than souls like myself. My girl had been like that, too, when I first saw her, a decorative form, exquisite, pathetic, entrancing. But the magic of the business was that slowly she was emerging from among those figures of two dimensions and coming to sit beside me, a companion. I had never had one before. There might never have been such a thing happen before to anybody, it seemed so strange and so astonishingly fortunate! For years I didn't get used to it. And if I am, in a way, accustomed to the idea now, it is only the occasional veiling of a vision, a breathing on the glass, as it were. At sea it will come upon me like a dream of misfortune—if we had never met, if—if—if! Who can tell?

"Mr. Hank and Rebecca were sitting in the little

room upstairs one evening when I came in for Rosa and I told them my adventures at the Hotel Robinson. They were drinking whisky, I remember, and talking together in a low tone, like conspirators. Rebecca laughed.

“‘Ah!’ said she. ‘I scared him that time, eh, Oscar?’”

“‘You!’ he answered in good-humoured contempt. ‘You made a big mistake there, my dear.’”

“‘Well,’ she retorted. ‘And who was it gave me the tip? Who was it said that English doctor was worth trying, eh?’”

“‘I did,’ said Oscar, looking at me and winking, ‘but I didn’t tell you to go and make a fool of yourself and spoil the game.’”

“‘Easy to say that after,’ she grumbled, and became aware of me looking at both of them in great perplexity.

“‘*Non capisce,*’ she added to her husband.

“‘The doctor mentioned a painful incident,’ I remarked.

“‘The devil he did!’ they ejaculated, looking at me in astonishment, and Rebecca went on. ‘It was nothing at all, you know. I thought he was a man. There was me sitting in the tramcar with Rosa on my lap, three or four years old, and he comes in by-and-bye and sits down opposite. And Rosetta—you know how little girls will take a fancy to a gentleman—Rosetta holds out her hands and smiles at him like a little angel. He was leaning his hands on his stick and she reached out and took hold of it and says ‘la-la!’ And I says ‘see the nice gentleman’s

stick,' and she gurgles 'la-la!' again. Cunning! What a bird she was! And you'd think any human-made man 'ud give the duck a penny and say how pretty she was. Not he. He sat there like a stone until I caught his eye and bowed to him.'

"'Fancy that!' said Mr. Hank in some contempt. 'Because I told her he was the doctor of the ship when Rosa was born, she thinks he's the father and goes up to the Hotel Robinson and wants money. Clever woman!'

"'Well,' said Rebecca, 'you didn't have any more luck with your Mrs. James. You got a flea in your ear there, didn't you? You had a great idea *she* was Rosa's mother.'

"'If you'd listened to what I told you, you'd never have run away with the idea there was any money in the doctor for you. There was some sense in what I did, because it would have cut both ways. But you would interfere. You look surprised, Mister,' he said to me, chuckling.

"Of course, I was surprised. I sat there open-mouthed. It is extraordinary how a man may become suddenly aware of unsuspected heights and depths in human life. It may be that I have always been less sophisticated than most. I am continually overlooking the shabbiness and rascality of the world, I find, in spite of the early apprenticeship which I served among business friends. I have often envied men this alertness of mind, this ever-present consciousness of the obliquity of human nature. And yet, I am not certain it is an enviable quality. I have a suspicion that those who have it envy us

who lack it. They seem to have for us a half-contemptuous, half-respectful liking. So with Rebecca. She patted my arm and said to her husband:

“‘Let him alone. He’s all right, is Rosa’s sweetheart.’

“At that moment Rosa came in dressed to go out with me. She had a white boa, I remember, and a white felt hat with a broad brim. She looked from one to the other and then back at me. ‘What’s the matter?’ she said.

“‘Nothing; only saying we ought to think about getting settled soon,’ I said, laughing, and we all laughed. And then, as we two passed into the narrow, twisted staircase to go down to the street, I heard Rebecca say quietly, ‘Did you hear what he said, Oscar? Did you, eh?’

“But, you know, I wanted to get clear of it all. I was more than ever set upon it. I understood better than ever Rosa’s vague dislike of a life spent among the people she had known. It was nothing to me that Rebecca and her husband were potential blackmailers or that little Mr. Sachs, ‘representing Babbolini’s,’ also represented a possible life-long neighbour if we lived at Sampierdarena. It was Rosa who felt the impossibility of it, and the subtle antagonisms of her environment. She knew, though she had no words for it, that there was a fuller life for us somewhere else. She would read an Italian translation of some English book, *Barnaby Rudge* or *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and when I came back to her she would ask me about my country. I was

often astonished to find how little I knew about it! What I did know was out of books. Humph!

“And what little I had known was fading voyage by voyage. Only rarely was there time to go from the Tyne or the Wear or the Clyde to my home in London. Coal is shipped and ore discharged in the North. But even the North meant little to me beyond the staiths where the coal came down from the pits, and the dirty, rain-swept back streets where the shipping-offices were. Once or twice I tried to get quit of the ship and went inland by rail. I saw cathedrals and castles and temperance hotels. A bleak and unfriendly land! Somehow I could not find the key of it all. Those sullen people living in the quaint streets round a superb cathedral—*they* were no kin of the men who built it or the men who prayed and worshipped in it either. Indeed, you can often find the cathedral empty and a sheet-iron shack round the corner near the railroad full of men and women shouting their heads off. And the rich people who lived in the castles had not much in common with the men who built them. It wasn't, mind you, that I was envying these people or even quarrelling with them. It wasn't that they were not orderly and hard-working and conscientious. They were all that. No, it was a curious impression they gave me of being only half alive. I used to watch them in church, in saloons, in theatres, and they seemed oppressed by some malign invisible fate standing over them and taking much of the sparkle out of their souls. I was oppressed, too, by the same influence. I used to wonder what it was.

Only at the football matches did it seem to lift at all. I always enjoyed the football. It was there you could catch in their faces the light of battle and the lust of conflict. There their features were sharpened to the tenseness you find hardened into a type here in America, men who are alive! But most of the time each class was oppressed by the one above it. Away at the top was the great ship-owning peer, the colossus of that particular part of the country, an ominous and omnipotent figure. Below him were other shipowners, smaller fry, living in fine houses where they had made their money, connected by marriage with the next below, still smaller shipowners and men who had built up successful repair-shops and ship-stores. Next came the retired ship-masters, living in villas named after their last commands, and skippers still at sea, their wives watching each other like cats at church on Sunday. Then, in tiny semi-detached brick boxes up narrow streets behind all these you would find mates and engineers packed like sardines. Their families, I mean. I often used to think of the abstract folly of these men calling such places 'home' when they sometimes were away years on end. Our chief mate took pity on me one week-end and invited me over to his house at Hartlepool. I forget which Hartlepool it was, it doesn't matter now. I remember, however, that we had to make several connections on branch lines to get there, and it was a continuous stampede from saloon to junction and from junction to saloon. I couldn't understand it at first, for the mate was a decent,

wide-open sort of chap, and fairly sober considering he had once been master and so had an inducement to drown dull care. But I discovered that his wife wouldn't have it in the house, and he was fortifying himself against a 'dry week-end.' It certainly was dry to me. The house, partly paid for when he had a collision and lost his job in the Fort Line, was still called *Fort William* after his ship, and I could see that the name-plate had been carved out of teak by the carpenter to please 'the old man.' How were the mighty fallen! You know, there was something pathetic to me in that man's drop from master to mate. To him it was more than pathetic, it was the next thing to the end of the world. He was just an average seaman. He had no culture, no art, no religion, no philosophy to support him or act as a substitute in such a misfortune. Even his children did not seem to compensate him. Rather they aggravated the case. They could no longer be referred to as Captain Tateham's children. He was only plain Mr. Tateham now, Fred to us; and when the *Corydon* was going out through the dock-gates to make the tide, anybody who wanted might see Mr. Tateham on her fore-castle head, standing glumly in the rain amid a tangle of ropes and half-boozed sailors and wisps of steam from the windlass. Here was the same thing over again as occurred in our own case. The root of it all was pride, the cursed pride that makes each class ape and envy the one above it, and stamp on the faces of the one below. Here it was, and it was England. This man had a grand little wife and three beautiful

clever children winning scholarships at the grammar-school. He had a microscopic home partly paid for and a safe-enough competency. Yet, because he had slipped a cog he was damnably unhappy. His pride was bruised. Fate had given him a nasty knock. He shook his head when I spoke hopefully of him getting a command in our company. His wife said nothing. Of course, although I didn't know it then, for, as I have said, I do not naturally suspect men, the fact was she knew and the owners knew and the underwriters knew why he had had a collision. She had her reasons for keeping liquor out of the house. It was not a very happy week-end for me, for the sight of those two straight, intelligent lads and their charming, golden-haired sister turning and turning inside that tiny house just because it was Sunday and a visitor was present, got on my mind. I saw away ahead, and wondered if they would have any luck in their fight with gentility! Humph!

"No, I was not enamoured of what I saw of England. And I found I was reluctant to go to my own home. I suppose it had so many regrettable memories. Anyhow, voyage after voyage I put off my visit, and so one trip, coming home to Tyne Dock, I found I had put it off once too often. My mother, who had been living at Brighton, was dead. It is curious how the sea seems to sterilize the emotions in some natures. Perhaps I am wrong, and judge the general from the particular. Perhaps we are deficient in power to express grief. Perhaps we don't feel it. I don't know. I have known men at

sea who raved about their parents' perfections and I was unable to sympathize and regale them with anecdotes about my 'old lady.' I couldn't. I don't remember ever talking to anybody about my mother. That isn't to say for a single instant, however, that I didn't esteem her. We simply were not designed to fit into the same scheme. We were of different generations. We were of cross-grained stuff, if I may say so, dour and tough and ill to match with common deal, and our roots were sunk in the restless, estranging sea.

"And so once more I came to London, a wanderer, noting what had been built and what pulled down. London! Never for a single day will they let it alone. It is like some vast cellular organism asprawl on the Thames mud, forever heaving and sweating and rotting and growing. A fungus, a sponge, sucking in the produce of continents, sending out the wealth of empires. I used to stand on London Bridge and watch the steamers loading and discharging from the grimy overhanging warehouses. A busman's holiday, you say. But there didn't seem anything else to do while I was waiting for a ship. I found my old British Museum Reading Room pass among my papers at home and I used it one day to look in upon my bygone haunts. It gave me a shock to see some of the same old grey-haired men and women reading out of the same silly old tomes. Yes! I was almost ready to swear one old girl was at the same page as I left her years before. And the suggestions in the manuscript complaint book! Good Lord! I glanced at it as I wandered

round, for it had often amused me in the past to see the weird and wonderful volumes the authorities were asked to procure. And here I found some crazy soul had demanded the first volume of the Chinese Zetetic Society's proceedings. Another complained of a lack of text-books treating of secret societies in the Tenth Century. And the world was going round outside all the time! I looked at them, these men and women—their shoulders humped as they scratched with their absurd quill-pens, their faces pallid with the light reflected from the pages. Some few, as though to show what a farce the whole business could be, had got out a perfect library of books, bastions of them, and lay back in their chairs, snoring. I couldn't bear it. I had to get out. The air was stifling me after the open sea, so I left that subsidized lunatic asylum and took the steamboat up the river to Hammersmith. It was spring, late spring, and there was a whisper in the air that meant, if I read it rightly, love and romance and youth. It was all round me as I walked out to Ealing. It was in the orchards as I rode on that old horse-omnibus that used to run between Ealing and Brentford. And next day I left the hotel and went out to where we used to live, on the Northern Heights, Gentility's last ditch before they succumbed to the onward rush of the street car and the realty agent! Spring was whispering there too, creepers were growing over new villas, new streets were scored across our old cricket and tennis ground by the church, an old tavern had been rebuilt in the very latest Mile-End-Road style. Our old house

had a motor garage built on one side of it, a green-roofed shack. Many of our neighbours had For Sale boards over their gates. Some had gone. A couple of brick pillars with stone pineapples on top of them had been put up at the entrance to a farm on the other side of the railway and a board said it was the site of Ashbolton Park, a high class residential estate. Some residents, I observed, were making a stand. One old lady, who had lived all her life on the Great North Road, and who was resolved to die there, had built a brick wall right round her little estate, a brick wall with a high, narrow iron gate in the middle, through which you could see the sullen Georgian house crouching at the back, like a surly old bear. Must have been a joyous household. I looked for my old sweetheart's home. It was there, but strangers lived in it. A servant I spoke to on her way to the post told me they had been moved to Chislehurst some time. The last ditch! In a way I felt it, this crumbling and withering of the old order, the order of which my parents had vainly tried to become companions. For it was typical of England. I felt it most when I walked out on the Great North Road through Barnet and saw the huge notice-boards up over the walls of princely domains, telling me how this desirable property and that magnificent country seat was to be sold at auction at Tokenhouse Yard on such and such a date. It was hitting the seats of the mighty, you might say, this insidious growth and crumble and decay. Nothing could stand against it. The strong, stark virtues, the high

courage and honour and fine courtesy, the patronage of arts and letters and religion which was the spirit of that old order, were all gone, and now the very shell and imitation of it was going, and we must prepare for the new people and their new ways. A new world. Only the road, the Great North Roman Road, seemed never to alter. A few inches more metalling, perhaps, another generation of menders, and so on. The traffic, of course, was different, for the traffic is the world. Indeed, when you stop and reflect, you will see that a great road like this one I was walking on that warm spring day, is a pulsing artery. London, that immense heart, with its systole and diastole, its ebb and flow and putrefying growth, lay beating behind me. Ahead lay that grey, brooding North, that vast coal-field whose output had made us masters of the world. Take it how you will, you must have roads. That is America's need to day—roads. Without roads no art, no literature, no real progress. No canals or railroads will do. Canals are too slow, railroads too fast. It is true they have brought trade and prosperity to the Great North West and the Great South West and the Great Middle West and all the other wests; but you cannot build up a great civilization on railroads. You must have roads, with pilgrims, or hoboes if you like, and artists and poets on foot, and taverns and talk. Railroads are the tentacles of plutocracy. Roads are democratic things.

“I was thinking very much on these lines that day and I was in the little hollow just beyond the

Kingmaker's obelisk. The sun had gone down behind Mill Hill and the evening was full of blue shadows, full of the odour of smoke and sap, full of mysteriously comfortable silences. For a few moments that particular rod, pole or perch of the great road was empty save for me and a lamplighter on a bicycle, who was coming towards me, riding one hand, his torch over his shoulder, a sort of elderly Mercury illuminating an empty world. On the left the great trees stood up close to the road, great shafts, the children of those who had stood there when the legions came up out of the Thames valley and marched north into the jungle. On the right the meadows rolled away eastward towards Enfield and Cheshunt and Broxbourne, meadow and copse and cornland. The lamplighter passed me with a soft buzz and click of sprocket wheels, and looking back at him idly, I caught the sound of the church-clock at Barnet striking the hour. The chime focussed my thoughts on the great peace of the land. Here at any rate, I thought, man has topped the rise. He has accomplished all he set out to do and the result is peace and happiness. I was sentimentalizing, no doubt, for I have never been able to live in the country. But as I stood there, looking back, the spell was broken. I heard a roar of a horn, one of those ear-shattering inventions that paralyze one's faculties, a grinding of gears and a slither of rubber tyres, and then the yell of a human voice. As I turned to jump I was nearly blinded by two enormous headlights. And the voice that had yelled, a half-familiar voice, shouted, 'What

the blazes do you go to sleep in the middle of the bally road for, eh?' I couldn't see anything at all until I had reached the grass at the side of the road, when I made out a long automobile standing askew across the road and panting. There was a low, semicircular seat with a man in it behind a large steering wheel, a seat so slanted that its occupant was practically recumbent. He had ear-flaps and monstrous goggles. I had a momentary mental picture of him as some Roman staff-officer rushing back to the base in his chariot. He had an imperious air as he glared at me and backed his machine with one hand to straighten it. I found my voice. I said, 'I have as much right to the road as you.' 'What?' he said, in a high note. 'To stand in the middle and block the traffic. What are you? An escaped lunatic? Have you made your will, hey?' 'Oh,' I retorted, 'If you've bought the road, or the earth, I'll get off it, of course. I should have said *you* were the escaped lunatic going along at that pace.' He laughed, a high, reedy cackle that seemed familiar, rose stiffly out of his place and stepped down as though he had cramp. 'Ouch!' he said, bending and straightening to unlimber himself. 'Where are we, hey? Barnet? Taking an evening stroll after the office?' And he took off his goggles and I saw my young brother's bright dark eyes and high-bridged nose and sarcastic mouth. He shouted with laughter, went off again into his reedy cry, and screamed, 'Pon my soul, it's Charley! Well, I'm . . . Where in the wide, wide world did *you* spring from? Revisiting the glimpses of

the moon? Good heavens!’ And he gripped my shoulder.

“That was how we met in after years. He was at his ease at once. I was bewildered. ‘By Jove, I nearly did for you that time. Nobody but a madman would stand in the middle of the Great North Road to admire the scenery, old chap. It’s suicide. An amateur would have had you in mince-meat.’ He stooped to examine his brake. ‘Charred, by Jove! And I expect some of the gears are stripped too. Get in.’

“‘Get in!’ I said in astonishment. ‘What for?’

“‘Why, come up to town and have dinner with me, of course,’ he laughed. ‘The Prodigal Son. Which of us two is the Prodigal, Charley? ’Pon my soul, I believe you are. You’ve been wandering all over the world, I believe. I went to the funeral—you know.’ I nodded. ‘And the old chap said you were in some frightful hole or other. Well, let me get in and you can sit on the step. I’ll take you up to my digs.’

“And that is what he did do, at a speed I could scarcely realize save by the wind that roared past my ears. We dropped down Barnet Hill like a bullet, we rushed through the gloaming with those blinding white beams cleaving the quiet gloom ahead of us and throwing preternaturally sharp shadows that reeled into oblivion like drunken goblins. It seemed to me, after my quiet meditative stroll, a monstrous invasion. We would flash round a curve with a whoop of the horn, and those pitiless rays would suddenly reveal in stark loneliness a man

and a girl, clasped in each other's arms. Or they would loom up ahead, walking and lovemaking, and the sound of the horn would strike them to attitudes of paralyzed fear. Once we overtook a party in a trap, jogging pleasantly homeward, and we left them holding for their lives and the horse rearing with terror. I was holding on for my own dear life, for that matter. My brother lay back in his seat and carried on a loud monologue directed at me. He said he had to go to Southampton that night on urgent business, but must dine first. Was going to motor. This was a Stromboli, hundred horse-power racing machine. He was agent for Stromboli's. Had sold a lot of cars at twelve hundred guineas each. Had been up in Scotland staying at a country-house. And so on. I listened, but had nothing to say. He had no interest in my affairs, and every word he said showed me we were nothing and could be nothing to each other. And yet it had so happened that he had been to our mother's funeral, he had played the proper part while I was away on the ocean, a wanderer and a prodigal. He even had, as I saw later, a band of crape on his arm, which somehow I had forgotten to wear. He made me feel insignificant and hopelessly inferior. And suddenly, as I clung there, another thought sprang up in my mind, the possibility that I might even now be on the way to a meeting with Gladys again. Not that I had any rational reason to dread such a meeting. Indeed, it was she who had left me and gone to him. But I did dread it all the same. I knew it would find me tongue-tied and foolish. I

could not rise to it and do myself justice. I am, I suppose, too self-conscious and shy.

“And soon we roared into lights and asphalt pavements and the heavy traffic. We crossed Marylebone Road and flew down Baker Street. Even I, ignorant as I was, had to admire the way my brother manœuvred his huge machine round the buses and cabs. It was skill, sheer skill, with a dash of luck that was very like genius. We were in Piccadilly soon after and then, turning into a quiet street, we stopped and the engine stopped too. A man in livery came running down from the house and I followed my brother up the steps into a richly furnished hall, with Sheraton chairs and Persian rugs and oriental vases. Frank took several letters and a telegram from a green-baize board with pink tape bands cutting it into a diamond-pattern, and beckoned me to follow him up-stairs. I did so, and we went into what he had called his ‘digs.’

“You must understand, of course, that I am no judge of the way the rich live. I can say truthfully that my tastes are simple. If I had millions I really don’t know that I should buy very much. Most probably I should be a miser as regards my own personal expenses. But for all that I could see that my brother’s apartment was extraordinarily rich in its appointments. There were so many details you could not imitate cheaply. A man could sit in those rooms, and eat in those rooms and go to bed there and feel that he was rich. He might even feel happy, for they were not only rich and convenient, but comfortable. I was left in a deep leather chair by a

wood fire burning in a bronze grate, in a room with chocolate-distempered walls hung with prints in black frames and one or two water-colours in white frames. I looked across at a small cabinet of books just above a writing table covered with many implements in bronze and ivory. For a moment I was reminded of those model rooms in department stores. I suppose that was unfair, but my sea-training had taught me that many tools generally mean a bad workman. Somehow, the moment the rich man blunders into any department of the world's labour, his wealth shows at a disadvantage. And gold pens and silver inkpots and jade paper-weights are as incongruous as ivory-handled sledge-hammers and rose-wood jack-planes, when you come to think of it.

“And if I were to judge such ways of living by that one experience, I should say that a man would eventually lose his sense of interior values. All these beautiful, useful and convenient things would assist him to greater achievement and finer virtue, but it would not be the same achievement and virtue that would emerge if he had stayed down in the arena and lodged with the gladiators in the back-streets. It couldn't be. Perhaps the men who could get the most out of wealthy environment are those like my brother, who simply care nothing for achievement or virtue as such, who live unconsciously for themselves and never have any sense of interior values, as I call them, at all. Their lives are like an exquisite design of nymphs and fauns and satyrs on an Etruscan jar—beautiful, rounded, com-

plete. And inside the jar is nothing but a handful of rubbish. . . .

“So I reflected as I sat in that deep chair and watched the wood-fire burning in the bronze grate. A silent man in a black suit came in and put a decanter and siphon at my elbow and went out again. Suddenly a phrase I had heard at sea came back to me, sharp and resonant. I was talking to old Fred Tateham, the mate, one day, he who had had a collision and lost his command, and he had been telling me his plans for his younger boy. He was going to put him in his brother’s office. ‘You know,’ said he, ‘I’ve a very successful brother.’ I forget what this successful brother had succeeded in—some genteel profession like accountancy or attorney. It struck me as amusing at the time, a man boasting of the possession of a successful brother, just as he might proclaim his pride in a clever child or a fine garden or a good terrier. And now the phrase came back as one I could use myself. I had ‘a very successful brother.’ To confirm this whimsical notion, the successful brother entered the room in evening dress, with a band of crape on the arm and a black tie. He was irreproachable as he stood on the rug snapping black amber buttons into his cuffs and settling his shirt-front. He was so irreproachable that I lost my feeling of discomfort and inferiority in his presence. He leaned his head on the carved stone frame of the fire-place and stared at the flames thoughtfully.

“‘You live here alone?’ I asked, and he nodded.

“‘For long?’ He shook his head. ‘I never stop

long in digs,' he remarked, 'I get sick of them, don't you know, and try fresh.'

"Where's Gladys?' I inquired, almost without knowing what I said. I was as surprised as he was at such temerity. For an instant he did not know what I meant. 'Gladys,' said he. 'Who the —— Oh! now I remember—— I don't know. Yes,' he went on, turning back to the fire, 'I remember now, Charley. I don't suppose I looked very well from your point of view, but all the same you haven't come home with a dagger in your sleeve, have you?' He laughed. 'By Jove, you weren't prowling along that road to-night waiting to stab me, were you, Charley? Like some bally foreigner.'

"You know I wasn't,' I said. 'And besides, I had no selfish reasons for asking. I thought you might be engaged.'

"I engaged?' he said, and shook his head. 'I'm not a marrying man. I wonder if we're going to die out, we Carvilles. Rotten race, anyhow. We seem to have no luck with our women. The mater was the only one. You should have seen them at the funeral. My God! No luck with our women, Charley. A natural tendency towards the lower middle classes. Don't you ever feel it? Like splashing through mud in dress pumps. I do. It's our curse, I believe. The Curse of the Carvilles!'

"I was so dumfounded at this unexpected piece of gratuitous slander that I sat perfectly still, although the silent servant in black had come in and announced dinner, and my brother was telling me

to go and have a spruce-up in his dressing room. It was like being knocked on the head with a wooden mallet. I was stunned. Even when I found myself in a small room full of bureaux and wardrobes and had nearly walked into a double full-length mirror, I still felt stunned. He wondered if we were going to die out, did he. And he assumed, with a blood-freezing fatalism, that we both had a depraved taste in women. I looked round helplessly for a wash-stand and caught sight of a bath-room beyond a blue portière. A natural tendency towards the lower-middle class, if you please! And I was just on the point of telling him about my sweetheart in Genoa! Going into the bath-room, I almost fell into a porcelain bath set in flush with the floor. A huge basin full of hot water stood ready under the nickelled faucets. Soaps of many colours lay at hand. Nail-scrubbers, manicuring tools, towels, sponges, creams, talcum powders, dentifrices, hair-lotions, blue bottles (with vermilion labels marked poison), green bottles marked ammonia, bottles with bulbs and sprays, cases of razors, festoons of strops—all these stood or lay on shelves at my elbow as I proceeded to wash my hands and face with a piece of yellow primrose soap that by some chance was among the welter of expensive brands. No luck with our women, observe. I certainly had had no luck with Gladys. But he, he, to whom women ran as though he were a necromancer, as though he had the secret of some spell that would make them forever youthful and lovely and happy—what complaint dared he

make against them? Yet he had formulated the monstrous theory that 'our family' must either succumb to the lower-middle class or die out because of our unfortunate luck with our women. It was one of those propositions which are simply preposterous in theory, but perfectly true in fact. As I washed my face in that expensive basin and rubbed it with the expensive towels and brushed my hair with the expensive ivory-backed brushes, I lighted upon this interesting feature of my brother's thesis. It was true. What I could not get over was how the dickens he had discovered it, living as he did. It struck me as a good example of the cleverness that is so much more useful than either genius or industry. I doubt if he had any clear notion of what was meant by psychology, but he had intuitively divined an obscure flaw in our complicated mentality, a flaw searching back to some unsavoury interlude in our history. Of course, by lower-middle class he meant servants. This silent chap in black, with the hair growing low by his ears, would be of that class, the lower-middle. And—here I put the ivory-backed brushes down carefully and looked at myself as though I saw a stranger in the glass—and what was more, by the same token, was not I, a seafaring man, also one of the lower-middle? Good heavens! I became so tangled up in the new points of view suddenly illuminated by my brother's outrageous remarks that I nearly stepped into his expensive porcelain bath again. And then I heard him calling to me that the soup was getting cold, and

I followed the servant into a small dining room singularly bare of everything save the indispensable belongings of a meal. Even the pictures were limited to one on each wall, as though more might distract the diner from his food. Except for a light over the lift opening there were only two electric candles with lemon shades on the table, where my brother sat, bolt upright, eating soup.

“Now, you know, I laughed as I sat down, because I would not have lived in this fashion at all. My idea of comfort, I reflected, was probably lower-middle. It included a high tea, with real food to eat, and a book propped up against the tea-cosy while I ate. Once or twice in my life I have been at the mercy of a *table d’hôte* and I was not happy. Passenger ships, for example. They have all sorts of *purées* and *consommés* and *entrées* and *fricassées* and *soufflés*, but very little nourishing food. For some mysterious reason they serve you with a homeopathic dose of each course and then pitch about half a ton of all sorts of things down the garbage shoot into the sea, for the gulls and fishes to gorge themselves on. No doubt, as I say, my notions were wrong and my brother’s were right. No use quarrelling about tastes.

“‘Why do you laugh, Charley?’ he inquired. ‘I was thinking of what you said about our unfortunate instincts,’ I replied. ‘No doubt it is true, but I was wondering how you discovered it.’

“‘I should say it was obvious in the past,’ he answered gravely. ‘As for the present—you and I you know—one has intuitions, what? And I have

talked with men of old family, and they have told me of cases they know of.'

"‘And you think,’ I said, ‘that it is a real danger, to marry beneath you?’

"‘Yes,’ he said, finishing his soup. ‘*You* aren’t contemplating it, are you, Charley?’

"‘I don’t look at life as you do,’ I observed. ‘I have become rather tired of all this talk about classes. I don’t feel myself to be a blue-blooded person at all. I am a seafaring man. Plenty of my shipmates marry into their own class—the lower-middle class.’

"‘The silent person in black came in with a bottle in a basket, and filled our glasses with a white wine. My brother turned his glass round as he looked at me solemnly. ‘I see,’ he said, and began to eat his fish.

"‘Of course,’ I went on, ‘your intuitions, as you call them, are quite correct as regards me, because when I marry, she will probably be just what you say. She would be as uncomfortable in a place like this as—as I am.’

"‘Good God!’ he muttered, staring at me. ‘Is it as bad as that? I should have thought you would be glad to live decently when you get the chance.’

"‘I have simple tastes,’ I answered.

"‘So have the beasts of the field,’ he retorted, and fixed his eyes moodily upon his wine. I laughed.

"‘Far better,’ I said, ‘to go each his own road and do the best he can. I’ve been through a good deal, Frank, since I saw you, and I dare say you’ve been through a lot too, only different. I’ve worked

and been worked upon, and I've come to certain conclusions. There is no place for me in all this ordered English life, with its classes and masses and so on. I was thinking about it this afternoon when you nearly ran over me. Pride is at the bottom of half the misery in England. Personal integrity is all I ask of a man, modesty what I admire most in a woman. As for what you call splashing through mud in dress-pumps, I know what you mean and I avoid it. *Worthless* women are to be found in all grades. Marriage, no doubt, is a lottery, not only for us, but for the women. I doubt if taking thought ever makes it any less of a lottery. You say we Carvilles have no luck with our women. I wonder what 'our women' would say if they heard you. Are we the last word in humanity? Are we flawless in our integrity and purpose and achievement?'

"My brother shook his head without looking up from his plate.

"'That's not what I meant at all,' he remarked sullenly. 'That sort of thing doesn't apply to women. I was referring to breeding. Women of breeding would not trust themselves to us.'

"'Well,' I said, 'I shan't lose any sleep about it. If I were chief of a passenger ship, the lady-passengers of breeding——'

"My brother waved his hand. 'Let us dry up,' he said. 'You don't understand.'

"But I did! I knew exactly what he meant and many a bitter hour it had cost me when I was infatuated with the convent-bred miss who had trotted

after him as soon as he had whistled 'come!' Breeding! The cant of it. The silly dishonesty of it! It is like those little three-by-two front yards you see in suburban streets, the last contemptible vestige of the rolling park-lands and fair demesnes of a far-off feudal time. It is like the silly Latin mottoes and heraldic crests you see on the doors of automobiles. It is a fetish in England. The boy from the great public schools sets the fashion, and all the little tinpot grammar-schools and academies follow suit and ape the clothes and the manners and the speech, the mincing speech, of people of breeding. And the little professional people who live in suburban villas do the same. They all worship and fear the fetish, the Collar-and-Tie god. You had better fasten a mill-stone about your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea than say or be or do anything their despicable little code considers ill-bred. Oh yes, I knew what my brother meant by breeding, but my experience had not tallied with what I had been taught. Sometimes I have fancied that some strain of chivalry had kept him under the illusion of birth and gentility. And then I have come to the conclusion that he was one of those who see things so objectively that they impress one as automaton. They don't learn, they know. They live in the world as if it was their home. They use their passions and desires as animals use their instincts. They have no diffidence before the great facts of life. And having this franchise in their pockets, so to speak, this permanent pass to every quarter of the City of the World, having this animal

candour of outlook, they are naturally inarticulate. They are easily misunderstood because self-expression is foreign to them and they have no interest in abstract propositions as such. They pick up a phrase and play with it for a while, just as a kitten will play with a ball, or a puppy will walk round with a piece of wood in his mouth, pretending it is a bone. My brother was a good example, I thought, of this. What he said sounded true, and as far as he knew was true, because he had not got it out of books. A man of 'good family' had put the idea into his head. No doubt he would forget it in a month or so. And whatever he might think or hear or say, he would go on living his very untrammelled life, unabashed by Time or the perplexities of existence, until . . .

"And here I stopped in my reflections, for I am giving you now my thoughts as I walked back to my lodgings in Bloomsbury. I stopped, for it occurred to me that a man whose course is untrammelled may easily get beyond the bounds set by the unimaginative laws of the community. In plain words, I stopped to wonder admiringly what would become of him, supposing he didn't break his neck in his own motor-cars. I had seen him start, the eight cylinders of his monstrous and ridiculous machine thundering their unmuffled exhaust into the night and scaring the passing cab-horses. He had moved off with a wave of the hand, rather pre-occupied with a portmanteau that was strapped beside him, moved off down Piccadilly towards Chelsea and Clapham. I reflected, as I passed the

sombre, crouching shadow of the Museum, now he was flying under the stars along the Surrey roads, the great beams splitting the darkness ahead of him, the dust of his passing settling on the hedge-rows and soiling the wayside turf. And to what end, I wondered, did my successful brother rush headlong through the night? To achieve greater success? To preach his gospel of breeding? To succour Gentility in distress? I wondered and went to bed.

"No, I did not see him again until long afterward, and in very altered circumstances, as they say. The harm he did me on this occasion did not come home until later, when in Italy again, I read in an Italian journal some of the details of the affair. A wave of anger swept over me then, I remember, at having been so far fooled as to preach to him my gospel of integrity in men and modesty in women, while he was deep in tortuous finance and unprofitable intrigues. Mind you, I don't know now the rights of the affair. The counsel for the defence made a brilliant effort to establish a case of the chivalrous shielding of a lady. He claimed that the accused had been lured to destruction by the voices of sirens. A man of brilliant social gifts, he had been carried away, intoxicated, by his success and had promised more than he could perform. The very fact of the lady (of rank) not coming forward, but leaving the prosecution in the hands of the trustees, was a proof that the accused was more sinned against than sinning. And so on and so forth. It was all in the *Weekly Times*. I walked up to the Galleria Mazzini one fine evening and sat

in the Orpheum reading the latest performance of my successful brother. But the Italian paper which first told me about it dealt with the incident from the artistic side. There are a good many Italians in Egypt, as you know, and this paper had a correspondent in Cairo with a sharp pen that cut little cameos of the cosmopolitan life that centres round the Esbekiah Gardens. For my brother had gone to Southampton on urgent business. His business was so urgent that he crossed to France that night and went straight to Marseilles, where he sailed in a Messageries Maritimes boat to Egypt. The article in the paper was called *The Flight into Egypt*. The new arrival at Shepherd's Hotel was the life of the English visitors still staying on in Cairo. Parties who had been living among the Beduin in the desert came back for a week at Shepherd's and were entranced with him and his hundred-horse-power car. The daughter of a Beyrout ship-chandler who had retired and built a house at Heliopolis was infatuated with him and tried to monopolize him at the dances. Incidentally we learned that his hotel expenses were five pounds a day. This interested me keenly, because at the same time I was living in ample comfort on exactly five shillings a day. I suppose, I don't know, for I've never had the money to try it—but I suppose there is a snap and a tang about a life that costs five pounds a day, which is irresistible to some souls. Or is it that the *cost* of things never enters into these untrammelled people's heads at all? I wonder.

“But for all my personal interest in that Italian article and the black ending in Bow Street and a sentence of three years, I appreciated the author’s treatment of his subject. He made a short story of it in the manner of Flaubert, minute, vivid and grim. He showed the weekly dances wearing thin at the end of the season, the daughters of the Levantine ship-chandlers, and Greek tobacco merchants, and Maltese petty officials, looking rather bleak at the prospect of another barren summer in Alexandria, when a new planet suddenly swims into their ken, young, rich, handsome, fascinating. They wake up again and the fight begins. You can see the Italian journalist, small, dark, with a pointed beard, pointed shoes, and sharp points of light in his dark eyes, hovering on the edge of the dance or perhaps taking a turn with the Levantine lady, observant and urbane. Things go on like this for a week or so when, the P. and O. boat from Brindisi having arrived at Port Said the day before, two English strangers arrive at the hotel. There is a dance that evening. I don’t suppose this was strictly true, but I can understand the artistic pleasure it would give the Italian journalist to make little changes like that in his story. You remember Sir Walter Scott’s confessed passion for giving a story ‘a new hat and stick.’ Well, there was a dance that evening, let us say, and the ladies, tired of the eternal English officer who never intends to let matters come to a head; tired of the French Canal clerk with his little friend in Alexandria; tired, perhaps, even of the witty and urbane Italian

journalist, who I imagine loved his *Genova la Superba*, his Chianti and the keen air and heavenly blue of his Ligurian Apennines far more than he did that flat Delta full of all the half-breeds of the world—the ladies waited expectantly for the return of their new inspiration from Heliopolis, where he was gone with a party in his hundred-horsepower car. They wait in vain. Later the party return, somewhat puzzled themselves, explaining that two gentlemen had come out and interrupted the affair by drawing Mr. Carville aside and conversing with him inaudibly. And Mr. Carville makes his excuses. He apologizes to the Beyrout ship-chandler and everybody else, but he must leave with his friends for Port Said at once and catch the homeward-bound mail-boat. His presence is urgently demanded on business in London. The company gape. But our friend, the Italian journalist, doesn't go in for gaping. His business is, after all, news, and he burrows round, interviewing and telegraphing brothers of the craft until he lays bare the rather pathetic story. He doesn't tell it among his friends in the Land of Egypt. At any rate, he says he doesn't. He saves it for his home paper and lavished a lot of literary skill upon it. I imagine he got a good deal of fun out of my brother while he stayed in Cairo.

“And so, you see, my successful brother had experienced a serious set-back. I had a grim feeling that the women, ‘our women,’ as he had called them, would feel it far more in their seclusion in Surbiton than he would in his seclusion in—wher-

ever he was. My feelings, in fact, were so grim that Rosa was perplexed, but I told her how my mother was now dead and I had no one in the world save herself. But at times I thought of our affairs gloomily. It seemed a poor end to our parents' fine dreams for the future—him so seriously set back, you may say, and me ploughing the ocean . . .

“And then it so happened that I got a chance of promotion on the spot. I'd been Second of the old *Corydon* a good while, when the *Callisto*, a cattle-boat, came in from the Argentine. The chief had taken sick and been buried at sea. The owners telegraphed I was to take the post, and they would send out another Second. It was very exciting, of course, getting in charge at last. It is extraordinary, the weight of responsibility that settles down on you all at once. Matters that you used to settle out of hand assume a new aspect when you yourself become the ultimate authority. It doesn't matter how hard a man has to work as Second, or what his troubles may be, he's always got the Chief behind him. He can sleep easy and deep, as he generally does, poor chap. But the Chief is different. He becomes a fatalist. He can't sleep. He has to make his decisions and keep his forebodings locked in his own breast. He becomes preoccupied with an absurd weight of care. He realizes that he cannot step round the corner and get the overlooker's advice. He is alone on the wide sea, and if he cannot solve his own problems, none can help him. And that is good spiritual discipline for a young man. He finds out then what he is really made of.

"And Rosa was excited too, for it meant we could soon get married and live in passable comfort almost anywhere we liked. It was a happy time for us. You see, we had grown accustomed to each other's ways and habits. We had struck a sort of average, and knew pretty well what pleased and what jarred each other. That, I imagine, is one of the secrets of living with a woman. Being simply considerate won't do, though, of course, it is necessary. But what a woman does hate is being startled with some fresh habit or idea. It spoils her illusion, her necessary illusion, that she knows all about you.

"I did not tell her anything of my successful brother's performances, though I have heard that a man always tells his sweetheart all the disreputable side of his family history. What he forgets to tell her she worms out of him after they are married. It may be so. I must be an exception, then. As I have said, Rosa was curious about England, and in trying to answer her questions I discovered I didn't know very much about England myself. But I said nothing about our family and their poor luck with their women. Perhaps I divined what an attractive tale my successful brother's escapades would seem to a romantic girl. There was a dare-devil glamour about everything my brother did that fascinates some minds. Indeed, it fascinated mine. But I was cured of glamour. My early love affair had left me a feeling of panicky fear of romance. Perhaps there is Puritan blood in us; but I feel that passion in itself is evil. I wanted no more of it. I looked forward to domes-

tic life, my own vine and fig tree. Some day, I dreamed, I might write another little book. At night, when all was running smooth, I'd put down odds and ends . . . Some day, perhaps. I don't think I shall fret, though, if nothing comes of it.

"I liked my new job. The *Callisto* was a much bigger ship than the *Corydon*, and more modern. Certainly cattle are very unpleasant cargo, and when we came into Genoa Harbour and the ship was being cleaned up, you could smell her clear away to the Galleria Mazzini! But at sea, on the long run south to Buenos Ayres, it was none so bad. I was looking forward to my marriage, you see. I was saving money and I was beginning to forget the past. It is easier for a seaman to do that than for anyone ashore. A sailor's past is all in pieces, so to speak. He can drop it bit by bit. But when you live ashore in one place, your past is like a heavy log that you're tied to and can't quit.

"Anyway, one night in Buenos Ayres, when I went ashore to mail a letter to Rosa, I was in good spirits. I reflected that, after all, my father's dreams of founding a family were not necessarily impossible. My brother's behaviour had nothing to do with it. I was going to marry Rosa. If we had children they would have a chance. But just as Rosa would not hear of Italy, so I was resolved with all my might against living in England. My children should never come under the influence of that gentility that had spoiled our early lives. For the old families in England who have been steeped

in it for centuries, for men like Belvoir, for instance, I dare say it is an admirable plan. But not for me nor for mine. I had been writing about it to Rosa and I'd put at the bottom, 'America?'

"Another thing I wanted to do ashore was to call at the Sailors' Home and see if they could give us a Mess-room Steward. The young fellow who had shipped that voyage had deserted. They are always doing it in the Argentine. Wages are very high and they all think that they can do well up country. They sign on just to get their passage free. The ship was in Number One Dock, loading grain, and I walked across the bridge, up San Juan and took a trolley car along *Balcarce* to the *Plaza de Mayo*. It was a fine evening in September, quite cool after dark. I was rather pleased with myself, too. The boilers had opened up uncommonly well; the Second knew his work, and I had nothing to do but keep an eye on things in general. I posted my letter, and after walking up and down the *Avenida de Mayo* for a while, went down to the *Parque Colon* to get a car back. The trolleys of Buenos Ayres are a bit puzzling to a stranger because the routes go by numbers. I knew nothing about the car I wanted except that it had the number 'Forty-eight' on the bows.

"The *Parque Colon* is a large place running parallel with the Number Three Dock, full of big trees, and the avenues through it are rather dark. Considering how close it is to the busy part of the city it is lonely. Men have been found on the seats—dead! I daresay you have heard of Buenos

Ayres. Like any other city where money can be made quickly, like London, like New York, Buenos Ayres is full of crooks. I believe they do their best to keep the place clean, but at that time it was pretty bad. The Skipper warned me to carry a revolver whenever I went ashore. Personally I'm against firearms. You generally find, after a row, that the dead man had a revolver in his hand. Unarmed strangers are not often touched.

"Number Forty-eight was a long while coming. Car after car came down the steep incline of *Victoria* and turning round eastward rumbled off along *Paseo Colon*. I walked a few steps down one of the dark avenues and sat down on a seat to finish my cigar. It was like walking into a dark room. I could hear the roar of the city, yet at the same time I could hear some local sounds plainly. A musty smell came up on the breeze from the river. Suddenly I heard the long deep note of a steamer's whistle: the Mihanovich Mail Boat leaving for Monte Video. I sat there quietly, thinking of nothing in particular, just glancing up now and then to note the numbers of the trolleys. At the sound of the whistle, though, I fell to thinking of Mihanovich. What a romance that man's life must have been! They tell me that about forty years ago he'd landed in that place, a Russian Pole, ignorant of the language, without any money or friends, a low-down beach-comber. And here he was, a millionaire. Every tug on the river has his big M on the funnel. He had fleets of steamers, mines, railways, banks; and he was even tender-

ing for the contract of the new docks the city wanted. No wonder others came to make their fortunes. No gentility needed to make *him* succeed. And thinking of him, somehow I began to wonder if my brother might not make good out in the colonies say, some distant part of the world. Some time before this my uncle had told me that Frank had been released. Good behaviour had reduced his time to about twenty months. Surely, if he started in some place where they didn't ask too many questions he might get another chance. And I hoped so. I had no malice against him. He was one of those who can't keep their nature down; women were the curse of him. Well, perhaps prison had changed him. My uncle had said that he was 'changed,' but that might be for the worse. And just when the old chap was deciding to pay the passage out to New Zealand—buy him a ticket and see him on board—my brother had vanished again.

“Mind you, the interest I took in the matter was, you might say, purely dispassionate. I turned the case of my brother over in my mind as you might turn over the problems of a book you are half through. I'm not sure that at the moment when I was interrupted I was not smiling at the insane life he had led. For me, in spite of my sea-going business, life was settled, sedentary, monotonous. You can talk if you like of the romance of the sea, you may call it picturesque, but you cannot call it melodramatic. Personally I dislike melodrama. I dislike violent passion of any sort. I

was thinking of all this and, as I say, smiling, when I heard tip-toes behind me, and before I could turn round I felt my throat held between two hands and my head pulled sharp over the back of the seat."

Once again Mr. Carville paused, opened his little brass box and took therefrom his piece of twist. With meticulous precision he pared and pared the required amount for his pipe, and began to roll it between his palms, his eyes fixed reflectively upon the geranium tubs. He had pushed his hat back a little, and above his steady grey-blue eyes there shone a pink unruffled brow.

"Once or twice in my life," he went on, "I have had a severe shock. Let me explain what I mean. A man brought up as I had been, in a genteel way, gets unaccustomed to physical violence. At school fighting was barred very strictly. In the works we pupils had no need to speak to the men at all. The first time I was ever struck was when I was a pupil. One of the apprentices thought I had been at his tools, came up and hit me a terrific blow on the chin. To anybody used to fighting it would have been nothing. It made me ill for a week. Of course, at sea I'd grown a good bit harder, but I'll never forget the first time a fireman went for me. There was always with me a feeling of outrage so to speak, a feeling not at all towards the man who struck me, you understand, but against myself, against a world that had made me what I was, soft and unskilled. That seems to me a peculiar weakness in our genteel civilization. You go

along, for years perhaps, living a quiet, orderly, intellectual life, protected by law, by the Army and Navy, by the Police and by all 'the conventions of good society,' and then suddenly a man comes up and gives you a punch on the jaw! A very weak place in our civilization, I think?

"And, moreover, it brings into sharp relief another feature of our civilized life and that is our impotence to utilize our total experience. With a dog, a tiger, or a savage at the moment of attack, all his instincts, all his habits, all his intuition and ingenuity and physical advantage are automatically rushed to the front and flung upon the enemy in the most effective way possible. But the civilized man is 'all abroad.' His glasses fall off his nose, he loses his balance and his breath, he flinches, goes blind with helpless rage and indignation, and is held in contempt by the very policeman he pays to take the job off his hands and lock his enemy up. It's no exaggeration to say that some of us lack that power of instantly marshalling our faculties, maintaining a clear view and keeping the blood out of our eyes, which is called 'presence of mind.' It is a good phrase, that, because an intellectual person, when he is attacked with sudden violence, hasn't for the time being any mind at all. He is just a heap of nerves, a compound of puerile passion and hysterical protest.

"It seemed to me that my throat was held for a long time, in that grip. As a matter of fact it could not have been more than a couple of seconds. But it seemed long. It seemed to me as though the pressure, which was choking me to begin with, in-

creased and increased. The power of it was not like the power of a machine, but evil, personal, spiteful. I remember I shut my eyes. I remember hot breath on my face. And then I remember a blank. In my memory it is like a space between inverted commas, without anything written. A blank. . . .

"My head had slid down against the back of the seat, my knees were all cigar-dust, and my hat had fallen off, when I opened my eyes. I heard someone say, 'Sit up, for God's sake!' and I tried to do as I was told, to 'sit up for God's sake.' Somebody was sitting beside me, pulling at my shoulder. Now and again I heard him say, 'You damn fool!' He was angry with me then. I wondered what I'd done to make anybody angry. I tried to think. I'd been sitting on a seat in the *Parque Colon*. Very good. Why was I a damn fool? I decided to argue the point with this chap. I struggled up and felt for my hat. I heard him say, 'Listen, you fool!' There he was again. Always a fool. Then he said, 'Well, *look* then, if you can't hear,' and he struck a match and held it before his face. Humph!

"He pinched the match between his fingers and we were in the dark again. He said, 'Well, Charley, old man, that was a near squeak for you, a damn near squeak. What the devil d'you go sitting round a place like this for?'

"I remember being very much amused at this. He was actually angry with me! He had nearly choked the life out of me, and he was angry with me! I had nothing to say. My tongue seemed

glued to my teeth. I brushed my hat and began to look for my cigar. What I was really looking for was my wits.

"He went on talking. 'Charley,' he says, 'I'm desperate. I'm down and out. For God's sake give me some money? What are you?' he says, 'what are you doing here? I thought you were a sailor. You look prosperous. Give me—lend me some money, or I'll have to take it.'

"While he went on like this, sometimes threatening, sometimes whining, I was collecting my faculties. The feeling that some one had wrapped copper wire tight round my neck was going away. I found my cigar. I struck a match, and by the light of it I saw my brother again.

"Yes, he was down and out. He had not had a shave for a week, his hat had been picked off a rubbish-heap, his trousers were muddied and torn at the knees, his coat was buttoned up to hide his black, hairy chest. He had no shirt. He was down and out.

"I settled in my mind what had happened before I spoke. This brother of mine had apparently made an exception in my favour. He had crept up behind me with the deliberate intention of strangling me and picking my pocket. Seeing my face he had decided that he could pick my pocket without strangling me.

"The curious thing was that I had no feeling of anger towards him. What filled me with a sort of panic was the fact that my brother had come back into my life. I hadn't realized it so plainly before.

but he scared me. I suppose he saw something of this in my face, for he says, 'Charley, let bygones be bygones, old man. Help me make a fresh start!'

"'Hold on,' I said. 'The last time I saw you, Frank, you had bags of money. You had my place in the house——.' 'Oh, dry up!' he says, 'never mind what I had, look at me now. Charley, look at me. I've walked every foot of the way from Rosario. I'm broke, cleaned out, desperate. I've nothing to lose.'

"'You never had,' I told him. 'What do you want me to do?'

"Well, what do you think he asked me for? Nothing less than fifty pounds. He seemed to have a mania for fifty pounds. He couldn't demean himself, even in that state, to make it less. You might say he thought in fifties. 'Good God, man!' I said, 'do you think I'm made of money?' 'You look prosperous, Charley. Give me what you have and I'll take the rest to-morrow.' 'I'll do nothing of the sort,' I said. 'Here's my car.' And a Number Forty-eight came down *Victoria*. 'Is it?' says he. 'It's mine too, then,' and he follows me up to the track.

"When I had sat down in the car I began to think. I didn't know what to do. Evidently my brother had been so absorbed in his own life, so indifferent to anything that had happened to me, that he didn't even know what I was. That didn't prevent him asking nearly three months' wages of me, though! Now, if he saw me go down to the ship he would never let me alone. He sat there

in the car near the door, his hands hanging over his knees, his head bowed to hide his chest, the paper ticket twisting in his fingers. That my brother! It came to me with a sudden shock, a spasm, that, as usual, right was on his side. I *couldn't* leave him like that. And yet what could I do? If I gave him money he would only prey on me again. Never mind: it was my duty to aid him. When the car stopped at the end of *Paseo Colon* I had made up my mind. I dropped off and waited in the dark shadow of the buildings opposite the *Parque Leyema*. He came up to me. I could see his lips trembling and his hands clutching. 'Charley, don't you play me false, don't you play me false! My God, Charley, I'll kill you—I'll do something with you, if you play me false.' It was like a child in hysterics. I didn't realize it immediately, but that was just what was the matter with my brother—hysteria. 'Easy,' I said, 'where can I take you? I'm not known here.' 'Take!' he says, 'to your own house, of course.' 'Listen,' I said. 'Do you hear what I say?' He nodded. 'Well,' I went on, 'I'm the chief engineer of a steamer in yon dock. If you come down with me, don't forget there's a sentry with a rifle on that bridge we've got to cross, there's two more patrolling the quay, and there's another armed watchman on board. And, Frank,' I added, 'when a man runs here, they shoot. They find out if he was a criminal afterwards. Understand?' He looked down on the ground, his shoulders moving in a sort of convulsion. 'Come on,' I said.

"He followed me like a shadow over the bridge,

along the quay and up the gangway. The watchman saw us come aboard, but otherwise the dock was deserted. My room was on the starboard side, the second door in the alleyway. I looked along and down in the engine-room. The Fourth was down below reading a novel on the bench by the dynamo. All the rest were still ashore—up at the *Bier Convent* or the *Apollo*, I suppose. I opened my door and Frank stepped inside.

“‘Now,’ I said, shutting the ports, ‘you’re safe.’

“He sat sideways on the settee, shading his eyes with his hands. Now that I saw him in the cold glare of two thirty-two candle-power lamps, he was awful. I took off my coat and set to work. From a drawer I took out a suit of underwear, socks, a suit of blue dungarees, a flannel shirt, an old cap and a pair of bluchers. I rolled these up in a big bath towel and handed them to Frank. ‘Frank,’ I said, ‘listen.’ He nodded. ‘See this key? It fits the bath-room. The bath-room is the last wooden door in this alleyway. Go down there, open the door, take the key with you, lock yourself in, switch on the light, have a bath from head to foot, put these clothes on, roll up those rags in the towel and bring them back. If you meet anybody take no notice, act as if you belonged. Here’s some soap.’

“I looked up and down the alleyway—no one there. Up and down outside the watchman slouched on the iron deck. Down below was the drone of the dynamo and the wheeze and whine of the Weir pumps. ‘Go on,’ I said. ‘Mind, the last wooden

door on the right. Don't go round the corner. Understand?' He looked at me for a moment and then flitted away down the long iron tunnel. I saw him poke about with his key, his body all crouched, the white bundle sticking out behind him. And then he vanished, and the door, heavy teak, slammed.

"I went into the mess-room then, to get some food. The steward as a rule left supper out for the juniors on duty, but as our young fellow had deserted I had to get the joint out of the pantry and carve some cold meat myself. I remember wondering what the Fourth would think if he came up and found the Chief nosing round the provision locker. There's a certain dignity, you see, that you mustn't lower before subordinates. However, he was too busy reading down below. I got a big plate of sandwiches and a slab of currant cake and went back to my room. I had a neat little mahogany dumb-waiter near the settee and I put it up and covered it with a linen towel. I spread the grub on it, and alongside of it I put a flask of whisky and a syphon of soda. I got quite interested. I had no idea of what to do with the man when he was washed and fed and clothed. I got down a box of cigars and set them alongside of the whisky. After all, he was my brother. I thought of the 'lady of high rank.' If she'd seen him as I saw him, she would have been satisfied. What would Gladys think of him? It may have been wrong, but I was rather pleased with myself. I was tickled to be able to help my brother. I knew that it was risky. I had no right to bring him aboard. I sat down to

wait, when I saw that I'd forgotten to tie up my canary, and I was hunting for the calico I used at sea when the door opened and my brother came in with a rush.

"It almost seemed as though soap and water had had a magical effect on him. Literally, he wasn't the same man. His arms and legs stuck out of the dungarees, his hair was still damp and hung between his eyes, and his big hooked nose was dark red with towelling. He stood there, his hand on the brass knob, looking at me pinning a piece of calico round my canary.

"He looked at the little dumb-waiter spread for his supper and passed his hand over his face. 'Charley,' he says, 'I must have a shave first. The pangs of a guilty conscience,' he says, 'are piffle compared with the miseries of a beard. Have you a good razor?'

"I had in my room a fold-up wash-stand and shaving-glass. I opened it and pointed to the razors. 'There's no hot water,' I said. 'No hot—Why, Charley, you don't expect a chap to shave in cold, do you.? Good God, man!'

"I give him credit for any amount of admiration for my little arrangements. I got out a little tripod spirit lamp with a copper-kettle that Rosa had given me; he was delighted. "'Pon my soul, Charley, you're an ingenious devil! Fancy you living here all so snug and I knowing nothing about it! Like Noah in his Ark, 'pon my soul.' When he began to lather he kept up a running fire of remarks, mostly insulting. 'And what are you here, old

man? Admiral? Lord High Muck-a-Muck? They put you up a jolly sight better than they did me in the second cabin of that infernal liner I came over in. Heavens! Old Uncle Christopher wanted me to go to New Zealand. He was cracked about New Zealand; dippy, 'pon my soul. When I asked to see the manager of the affair, you know, the Skipper, they showed me an underbred brass-bound official called a *Purser*, who said he'd put me in irons if I wasn't civil. Oh, this world has some bounders in it, Charley, my boy. What do you get here, Charley? Pretty good screw, I suppose?' And so he ran on. When he had finished spilling the talcum powder all over the floor, using my brushes for his hair, he turned round and looked over the provisions.

"'Frank,' I said, 'when you've had something to eat and drink, I'll have a talk with you.' 'With pleasure, my dear chap,' says he. 'But what a meal! Mutton and sandwiches, cake and whisky. Is this your usual feed, Charley, may I ask? No wonder you look dyspeptic.' 'We're out of pheasant,' I said. He looks at me and bursts out laughing. 'Charley, my boy, I wonder how much you really will stand.' 'I'll tell you presently,' I said, and went on smoking.

"Dyspepsia didn't scare him much. He went across my dumb-waiter, eating every crumb, drinking every drop of the whisky and soda. Then he took a cigar, snipped it in his big teeth and held out his hand for a match. And then—he was sitting on my red plush settee, while I was in my

arm chair—he swung his feet up and lay back on the cushions, puffing the smoke up in great clouds. ‘Quite a reader!’ he says, waving his cigar towards my book-case. ‘You were always a chap for worming.’

“‘Frank,’ I said, ‘we’ve a long account to settle. Somehow or other we’ve always been antagonistic. Why?’

“‘How do you mean?’ he says.

“‘What have I done to you, that you should be always turning up and queering my pitch?’

“‘Oh, you mean Gladys,’ he says laughing. ‘No,’ I said, ‘I don’t mean Gladys particularly. I mean everything. Every time we come together you do me a bad turn.’

“‘How can I do you a bad turn now?’ he inquires blandly. ‘I don’t know,’ I said, ‘I don’t know.’

“‘I can tell you how you can do me a good turn, old man,’ he says, sitting up. ‘Can’t you get me a billet, here? Just to get home, you know.’

“‘We don’t go home,’ I said. ‘We’re on a time charter between here and Genoa.’ ‘Oh, that’ll do,’ he says. ‘I can go home from there easily enough.’

“‘I can give you a fireman’s job,’ I said, ‘or a greaser’s.’

“‘A greaser’s!’ he says, his eyes sparkling at me. ‘You say that to me, Charley——’ ‘Easy,’ I said, ‘if you shout you’ll have some one in here. All the jobs I can give you are inferior. You have no rating on a ship, Frank. I’ve had to work five years or more for this job. Your automobile en-

gineering is no use to you here, you know. You're down and out, you said just now.'

"'Yes,' he said, 'that's a fact. I must be humble and take anything. Anything, Charley.' 'Well,' I said, 'I can give you a light easy job as steward here for the engineers. If you hustle round you can pick it up. You'll have to swallow all your pride, you know, as I did when I came to sea. You'll have to make beds, tidy up the rooms, lay the table, wash dishes. Will you do it? The last one has just deserted. I was going to get one to-night if I hadn't met you.'

"He lay on the settee a long while, smoking and looking angrily at the books in the case.

"'Mind,' I said, 'this is on condition that in Genoa you clear out and leave me in peace. It's on condition you sign on under an assumed name. I've a position here. If it was known—you understand. I'm the chief engineer and it might cause trouble.'

"'Charley,' he says at last, 'you're a good chap and I'm a rotter. I'm a bad egg, a rolling stone, flotsam, garbage, punk, anything you like that smells to heaven. I hate myself sometimes. It's hate of myself that makes me desperate. But, give me this chance. Perhaps a sea-voyage will brace me up. Genoa, you say? They speak French there, don't they?'

"'No,' I said, 'they speak Genoese.' I couldn't help being a little sarcastic about that. 'But you'll find they speak English at Cook's office.'

"He looked at me for a while, his big eyes blink-

ing through the smoke. He was thinking, I suppose. There's no doubt he has a remarkably active mind. I could feel he was taking in the situation. Suddenly he put his arms up and stretched, his feet crushing against the end of the settee.

“‘Charley, my boy,’ says he, ‘I’ll winter in Italy, that’s what I’ll do. It’ll be a change after Rosario,’ he says.

“‘You can do as you please,’ I told him, ‘when you’re paid off.’ ‘Until then, you’ll have to do what the Second Engineer tells you. Understand?’

“‘Oh, yes, Charley, I’ll be as humble as dirt,’ he says.

“Well, he was. I sent him ashore with a few Argentine dollars to get a bed for the night, and the next morning he comes down to the ship, as meek as milk, and asks the Second for a job. I’d told the Second about him, saying he’s been recommended to me by people ashore and so on. I can’t say I was very sanguine about the experiment. About the time in port I mean. At sea I had no fears. I knew that the discipline of the sea would be more than a match for any brother of mine.

“I began to wonder, as the days went on, what had become of the man who had sprung up and nearly strangled me that night. It almost seemed as though there was some mistake, as though my brother had vanished into the night and some other beach comber, with a big nose and dark eyes, had applied for the job. Never by any sign did he let on that he had seen me before. When I took him to the cabin for the Skipper to sign him on

he gave the name of Frank Freshwater, without batting an eyelid you might say. When he'd gone out again the old man says to me, 'Looks as though he'd been a gentleman, years ago.' I said I believed that was the case, which was the reason folks ashore wanted to help him. 'Ah,' says he, blotting the articles, 'I'll expect he'll run off before we sail, Chief. These gentlemen are slippery customers.'

"My brother didn't run off. He soon got into the way of doing the work of Mess-room Steward. It was wonderful acting. 'More tea, Frank,' I'd say, and he'd jump for my cup—'Yes sir, yes sir.' It got on my mind. Sometimes when I was sitting in my room smoking and reading, I would hear him behind me setting something straight, making the bed perhaps, filling the water bottles, or cleaning the brass-work on the door. He'd never speak to me unless spoken to. If I said, 'Frank, how are you getting on?' he'd say, 'Very well, thanks,' and go out. I would sit there, wondering what had got hold of him. Was he pulling my leg?

"And at sea it was just the same. I expected a change at sea. Not a bit of it. In a way, you know, it's a lonely life I had at sea. It must be, on a ship where there's brass-edging and rigid discipline. The Skipper would take his walk up and down the bridge deck, and I would take mine up and down the awning-deck aft. And having the curious thing locked up in my breast, so to speak, it got on my mind. It sounds strange, but I began to wish my brother would speak to me. I began to recall

how, when he was a little chap with long brown curls, he would bawl and storm because his bricks fell down. After all, we were brothers, eh? This politeness of his was too glaring. I felt that if he were to drop in in the evening, after eight bells say, I would let discipline slide enough to have a chat. But no! It was he who stood on his dignity. He would stand there at meals, watchful of my slightest want, watchful of everybody's wants, never saying a word, rigid as a statue. When his work was done he'd disappear into his own room, which he shared with the Second Cabin Steward in the port alleyway, and I wouldn't see him again until seven bells in the morning, when he'd come in with my tea, open the wash-basin, draw the water, set the towel, light the spirit-lamp, lay out my razors and say, 'Twenty past seven, sir.' Me, his brother!

"It gave me an insight, more than anything else could have done, into my brother's character. I saw that his failure was not due to weakness, but to strength. He went his own road. He had his own morality, his own code. Indeed, he almost convinced me that perhaps for *him*, Good and Evil didn't exist. I used to wonder what he was thinking about while he stood waiting on us, listening to our engine-room gossip, our talk of ships and the sea. Most of it must have been Greek to him, of course. If I stole a look at him, he would glance round the table, as though I had asked for something. It got on my mind.

"And a better mess-man never stepped, they said.

Nothing was too much trouble. The Second, a very typical man, without much imagination as far as I could detect, quite startled me by saying, with his eyes wide open and a curious, proud expression on his face, that in *his* opinion, if the truth were known, 'our new mess-man' was a lord. What amused me was I never could get out of him what made him think so. I said, 'Go on with you. *You* wouldn't know a lord if you fell over one.' 'Oh, wouldn't I,' he said, turning sulky. I laughed. It just showed you what a tremendous power my brother had over people. And as the days went by, stories came up from various quarters, fabulous stories of 'that new mess-man.' They came up and went down again, and then came up again more fabulous than ever. He knew what he was doing perfectly well, and he showed a remarkable insight into the silly, credulous nature of seamen by the way his adventures were coloured. He never told *me* anything beyond that he'd had a fierce time. The legends were legends. The second cabin steward, who roomed with him, and a couple of impressionable apprentices, were forever bringing up new variations of the doings of 'that new mess-man.' They told a tale of how he had run through a fortune in no time and had been compelled to run away from his creditors. How? Oh, horses, you know, Newmarket and Epsom, supper parties, going everywhere first class, cigars . . . champagne . . . and so on. The second cook told the pantry-man 'that new mess-man' was a marvel on the mandolin; had been in an operatic orchestra . . . studied abroad.

Where? Oh, on the continent. And the old man himself heard a fantastic yarn from somewhere or other and handed it on to me, that 'your new mess-man' had been in the diplomatic service and had been broken 'on account of a woman' at one of these here embassies. 'No!' I said. 'Oh, quite likely,' says the Old Man, though I doubt if he knew any more of embassies than of metaphysics. The story gave an aristocratic sort of tinge to the ship, I suppose. As I say, I didn't know what had been happening in my brother's life of late and I had no great desire to know. Whatever he had done did not prevent him looking after his work. The Second was quite disturbed over the indefatigable way 'that new mess-man' tidied up his room. It was what the newspapers call 'an Augean task,' for the Second was not very neat in his habits. Boots, matches, cigarette-ends, pieces of waste, dirty boiler-suits and torn newspapers and magazines all over the floor. He never would put away his shore-clothes until we'd been at sea a week or two, and he kept a good many small tools under his mattress. Sailor fashion, you know. He had an electric fan, which for want of screws had tumbled into his wash-basin and cracked it. 'That new mess-man' had taken the fan away and jiggered with it until it ran as sweet as ever, and he'd got some cement and fixed the basin, and made a fine job of it! This was the Second telling me all about it. And he thought this paragon was a lord. He seemed to think a lord was an ingenious kind of plumber.

"Of course, as I've tried to explain to you shore

folks, I stood too far above the common gossip of the ship to hear everything. Only now and again I was made to realize that my brother was still the same fascinating illusionist. It is a great gift. Don't think I'm not appreciative of it. Indeed, I envied him his power of mixing, as they say, his knack of 'setting the table in a roar.' A great gift! Once, coming along past the galley, where he was talking to a little crowd of cooks and scullions and cattlemen, I saw the bent heads, the eager, sparkling eyes, the parted lips, hanging expectantly on his every word. And, when the joke came, the quick rush of breath, the slapping of thighs, the explosions of laughter, the barks of the cattlemen and the high windy cackle of the young fellows. Gift? It is one of the gifts of the gods, I think. And one night, coming down the port alley-way from the chief mate's room, I passed my brother's quarters. There was a ragged curtain across the door-way, and as I passed in my rubber-soled shoes I caught a glimpse through a rent in the fabric. Three young chaps, the second-cabin steward and the two apprentices, were sitting on the settee, their eyes, rapt, their mouths open. The Third Mate, an officer, of all the people in the world, was leaning against the wash-stand, his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed in the same attentive way. I moved a little and saw my brother on the drawer-tops, smoking a cigarette, his eyes cast down, speaking in a low voice. As I watched he raised his eyes and gesticulated, smiling and shrugging his shoulders. And the audience nodded and smiled too. He was taking them along

with him. He was telling them a story, the oldest trick in the world. I realized with a start that I had no business there, and went along and round to my own room. But I envied him, for with all his waywardness he had the gift of gifts. He could charm the hearts of men and women, and hold them with his words.

“As we came up the Gulf of Lyons I was thinking of seeing Rosa again, and so perhaps I gave less attention to Frank. But just as usual, the morning we arrived, as I was sitting in my room about five o'clock, waiting for the stand-by gong, he came in with coffee and toast. ‘I suppose you’re for the beach now, Frank,’ I said. ‘Oh yes,’ he says, ‘as soon as I’m paid off!’ ‘You’ve done a damn sight better than I expected,’ I said, and then I stopped because he was looking at me in a peculiar way. He drew the bunk-curtains close, shifted the mat straight and went out.

“I was busy for a good while down below after we were tied up, for the Second was scared of a bad place in one of the furnaces. When I came up and sent the Third to call Frank, he came back and said he’d cleared out. ‘Went ashore with the Old Man, sir.’ Well, I thought, he’ll be down to say good-bye, I suppose. I turned in, so as to be fresh in the evening for Rosa.

“It was a beautiful night at the end of October. Genoa is always beautiful to my mind, but that evening she was *la Superba*, as the citizens love to call her. Right round the bay the harbour lights twinkled, and above them the lights of the city

seemed like a necklace of diamonds, hung against the night. As the boatman rowed me ashore I felt satisfied with myself. I was going to see my girl, and if I thought of my brother at all—well, I'd done the right thing by him. I wished him well. I intended, since he had made good, to give him some money to get home to England in comfort, if he wanted to go. Yes, I was very pleased that night.

“It wasn't long before Rosa and I were in the trolley car that runs along the *Via Milano* up to the *Piazza de Ferrari*, where all the cafés and theatres are. I bought tickets for the *Verdi* and then we went to *Schlitz's*, a big German restaurant in the *Via Venti Settembre*. I like restaurants, you know. Old Sam Johnson wasn't so far out when he voted for a tavern. That's one thing this country can't either import or invent—a tavern. They have the same name; every public house is called a café; but what are they? Simply *pubs*.

“We were coming up the *Via Venti Settembre* again to the *Verdi*, under those arches, when I saw my brother. He was standing by a little table set out by the kerb where an old woman was selling lottery-tickets. It used to be as much to the Italians as horse-racing is with English people. The evening papers had the winning numbers in the stop-press column. I saw my brother put down a bill, and the old woman gave him a bunch of tickets. And then he looked up and saw us.

“I ran right into trouble, you know, this time. Somehow or other, I'd forgotten Rosa. I didn't simply not try to avoid him, I waited for him to

come up. It seemed only the right and proper thing. He came up, lifting his cap. He'd bought a suit of clothes and a pair of those long-toed foreign boots, but he still had the old cap I'd given him. Those clothes fitted him well, I remember, but he was a well-made man and easy to fit. The coat had a waist to it, and he was a fine figure of a man as he came up.

"I got a sort of panic at the moment he spoke. 'I'll see you to-morrow. I'll see you to-morrow,' I said, and tried to draw Rosa away. She looked at me in surprise. 'Who is it?' she asked me in Italian. 'Never mind,' I said. 'Come away.' 'I'll see you to-morrow.'

"'Why, Charley!' he says. 'You aren't going away without introducing me, surely.'

"I was in a cleft stick. All of a sudden the memory of what he had done with Gladys had rushed over me. I pulled Rosa away. 'To-morrow,' I kept saying to Frank. 'See you to-morrow.' He didn't understand, apparently; kept up with us, his lottery tickets in his hand, trying to look into Rosa's face, and she hanging back looking at him. In this way we came up to the *Verdi* doors, and I started to go in.

"Women are obstinate sometimes. Rosa kept looking at him as he walked beside her, and before we were inside the vestibule he had explained that it was strange I wouldn't introduce him, seeing we were brothers. She looked at me. I couldn't deny he was my brother. All I could do was to say, 'Go away, Frank, go away!' But he didn't

go away. He stood beside us in the crowd in the vestibule looking down at us, laughing, and talking, absolutely at his ease. As usual he was putting me in wrong before some one I knew. 'Why,' he says, 'even that silly blue-nosed old bounder of a captain of yours has given me a good character. Come on, Charley, be a sport. 'Pon my soul, Charley, I never knew you were much of a man with the girls. Sly old dog, eh? Going to sea all this time and spotting all the hot-house fruit, eh?'

"'Frank,' I said, 'this lady is my future wife.'

"He fell away from us in his surprise, looked from Rosa to me and back again, quick, like a bird, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

"My brother Frank is one of those men who simply cannot believe in women. They honestly do not believe a virtuous woman exists. They strike you as vicious and coarse, these men, just when they are trying to be most charming. To my brother women were hot-house fruit. You can't blame such men altogether, because women themselves foster the idea. They act more like lunatics than sane people. Their heads are turned. No, you can't blame the men entirely.

"My brother was perfectly sincere when he burst out laughing at me. He didn't believe me for a minute. The idea of my 'walking-out' with a young lady in Genoa was comic. It was of a piece with all the rest of my damn foolishness. I never attempted to explain my feelings to him, and I don't suppose he understands to this day the terrible pain his laugh gave me. You can realize,

when I'd been known to Rosa so long, that it would.

"My brother, somewhat to my surprise, left it at that. He threw up his hands, still holding the lottery-tickets, and turned away. We went into the theatre, and when we were fixed in the *poltrone*, seats where you can have a little table brought to you for the drinks and ices, I was able to explain something of my brother's record to Rosa. Every thing I told her about him interested her. Compared with my own history it was a story of adventure indeed. She would ask questions to lead me on. 'What did he do then?' When I told her simply that I'd met him 'down and out' at Buenos Ayres, she was so sorry. The mere trifling fact that he'd robbed one woman and swindled half-a-dozen others didn't matter. Of course, I couldn't tell her the details of Gladys' story—he had me there! And I wouldn't lower myself to speak of how he tried to choke me. After all, I believe that was a mistake. He wouldn't do that to me knowingly. So that you see, when you come to look at the tale I told Rosa, what wasn't downright pathetic and unfortunate was romantic and daring. Rosa was a quiet girl. We didn't quarrel over the matter, but I could see she was thinking of my brother, a fine figure of a man, by the way.

"I am quite sure now, after all these years, that it was what we would call just a passing interest. All women have their sudden romantic likings for strange men who catch their imaginations. I remember taking tea one afternoon in the house of a friend on Clapham Common. His sister, a middle-

aged woman, and a friend of hers, middle-aged too, entertained me until my friend came in. These two women, fat and forty, could talk of nothing else for some time but a wonderfully nice 'bus-conductor they had spoken to coming back from Richmond. 'Oh, he *was* such a nice man!' they said, and then they'd look at each other. I was younger then and slightly scandalized. Women are queer. I suppose in a week they'd forgotten his very existence; but at the time, 'Oh, he *was* a nice man!' So it was with Rosa. Frank had filled her imagination, as he always did; but if she had not seen him again it would have passed like a mist.

"I don't blame her, nor even Frank, now. It was a tragical accident, and very nearly wrecked my happiness. You may say I ought to have left him in Buenos Ayres. I thought so at one time; but I believe now it would have made no difference. We were bound to meet some day. It was fate.

"I saw Rosa home and went back to the ship. The Old Man was going aboard just as I came to the gangway and asked me to go down and have a drink in his room. He was very excited about some lottery-tickets he had bought. Skippers and chiefs go in for these things a good deal. One captain in that employ won a cool ten thousand dollars in Bahia Blanca. It was the thing to do. Up in the agent's office the clerks would talk over the lottery drawings, and each skipper would be anxious to do the same as the others—you see? Well, my Old Man had bought fifty tickets. He was full of a system by which he picked them.

Every third one, then every third one again. A mad idea! I thought of my brother waving his bunch, thought of his picking them up without even looking at the numbers. I said to the Old Man, 'Cap'n, you haven't a single good number. I expect the man who's got the lucky one is up in the city now.' 'Why, how do you know?' he said, passing the soda. 'I just feel it,' I said. He was worried about that. Gamblers have the most peculiar notions.

"Well, he sent the third mate ashore just before tea to get the *Sera*. 'Come on, Chief,' says he, coming into my room where I was washing, 'let's go through the numbers. I'm just crazy to prove you wrong.' 'Where did you buy them?' I asked. 'Outside the *Verdi*,' he told me. We went through them. I read out the numbers of his tickets while he compared them with those in the paper. His highest number was some two hundred thousand, two hundred and fifty-one, I remember. And the last winning number in the paper was that same number of thousands, two hundred and fifty-two. He dashed the paper on the floor. 'Darn!' he says, 'why didn't I take one more. Think o' that, Chief!' What was the use of thinking of it? 'I'm not surprised,' I said, 'though it is aggravating.' Humph!

"Half way down that splendid new street, one of the finest in Europe, the *Via Venti Settembre*, and not far from Schlitz's Restaurant, is Bertolini's Bristol Hotel. Rosa and I were walking down past it that night, on our way to *Acquasole*, where there was a band, when Frank came out. A cab stood at

the kerb, and he was making for it when he saw us and bore down on us. He was dazzling. He had a big ulster and he was in evening dress. 'Now, Charlie, my boy, this is the limit. I was coming to see you. Come and dine with me at the *Roma*,' and he dragged us to the cab.

' "Yes, his luck was back. He'd picked up the winning number, the one the Old Man had left. Ten thousand francs! He wasn't going to wait for the State to shell out. He just went to the Russian Bank in the *Piazza Campetto* and discounted the ticket for cash. In one flash he'd won more than I earned in a couple of years. Yes, he was going to winter in Italy, he said. Naples, Rome, Florence, Bologna, Venice; then Paris and London. Before I knew what I was doing I was standing outside of the *Roma* watching him help Rosa out of the cab. He carried things with a rush. Nothing too good for him. This was his natural element, luxury, excitement, whiz and snap. What a man!

"Again, I say, I don't blame Rosa. What girl wouldn't be fascinated by such a man? I had never realized before how charming a man could be. What had I to offer a woman to compare with him? In a few hours he had picked up enough Italian to patter with. Rosa spoke English, it is true, but what jokes he got out of his Italian! How he talked! There was I, just as I am now, blue serge and rather a plain little man, nothing special anyway. I was forgotten. The waiters took no more notice of me than if I'd been a portmanteau. And

yet in the bank I had much more money than Frank. Ah! but he was flashing it. Didn't they run!

"I tried to have it out with Rosa as we went down to the *Via Milano* that night. Perhaps I was unreasonable. Perhaps I showed jealousy—a foolish thing to do. We parted rather cross with each other. You see, I'd never spent money like water on her. I was saving to have a home.

"I had rather a hard day following. The boilers had to be gone through, and that's a job I never leave to the Second. The boilers are the vitals of a ship. I don't care what happens in the engine-room so long as my boilers are all right. And so I was a bit late getting away at night. I went along to Rebecca's. Rosa was serving in the café, and I began to grumble to Rebecca. I told her that if necessary I would pay for some one else to do that work until we were married. Not that the chaps annoyed Rosa now that she was engaged, but I didn't like the idea of it. Rebecca said Rosa was doing it of her own accord. She said she didn't know what had come over the girl. Rosa came upstairs, and when I told her not to go into the cafe, she said she'd do as she liked. She said she didn't want to go out that evening; would rather stay at home. We had words . . .

"I left in a huff, I suppose, and went back to the ship. I felt badly used. The Old Man came along to my room and spent a couple of hours telling me how that new mess-man had won ten thousand francs. There were all sorts of frills to the story

as he knew it. One of the clerks at the agent's had told him that the man was an English milord. That was a bit of my brother's cleverness. He had registered at the *Bristol* as Francis Lord. Of course, the papers had made the most of it.

"For two days I never went ashore. I was annoyed at Rosa. You know, these little tiffs are inevitable, though I must say we'd managed without them up to this. I said to myself that when she wanted me again she could have me. The mood lasted two days. I began to get anxious. I couldn't rest. After all, we were engaged. The ship went home for survey next voyage, it was rumoured, and I had promised Rosa we should go together. I put on my shore-clothes and went up to Rebecca's. I went in to have a drink first, intending to go round to the private door afterwards. Just as I sat down Rebecca came in and saw me. She beckoned me to come inside. We went upstairs. 'What's the matter?' I said. 'Rosa!' says Rebecca. 'She went out this evening to meet you, she said, and she's not back yet.'

"For a moment I couldn't quite see the drift. Perhaps I'm slow. But then I realized what might have happened. I took my hat and ran downstairs. Outside a carriage was crawling past. I jumped into it and told the man to drive all he knew to the *Bristol*. It's a stiff climb, but those two horses tore along the *Principe*, past the station, through *Piazza Caricamento*, up *Via Lorenzo*, full tilt. I jumped out and ran into the hotel and asked for the manager. I described my brother as well as I

could. 'Yes, yes,' he said, 'that would be *Signore Lord*.' He had just paid his bill and gone. He was to get the Twenty-fifteen for Milan. The commissionaire said the *Signore Lord* had driven to the *Brignole* station, though he had been advised to go to the *Principe*, where he could get a better seat. I gave the man a franc and bolted out again. '*Stazione Brignole*,' I told the man, and away we went. The 'Twenty-fifteen' would be there in about ten minutes. Five minutes later I was in the dreary, half-lighted, bare-looking waiting-room. There was only one person in sight. It was Rosa."

Mr. Carville paused and raised his head. We became aware of some one calling. I turned and beheld Mrs. Carville standing, her hands on her hips, at her door. She was calling to her husband in a clear, strong, vibrant voice. With a slight shrug, he rose.

"*Si, si, Rosa*," he replied equably, and then to us he smiled and, raising his hat, set it well over his eyes. He looked at his watch.

"Gee!" he said, "I must be off. I'll have to finish the yarn another time. Good day to you."

Looking down at his boots for a moment reflectively, and pocketing his pipe, he stepped down and walked sedately towards his house.

CHAPTER X

ANOTHER LETTER FROM WIGBOROUGH

FOR a few moments we sat still, oblivious of the flight of time. The afternoon sun threw long shadows across the road. Mrs. Wederslen flew past in her automobile, inclining her haughty southern head as she sat, erect and dominant, behind the steering-wheel. The rumble of the trolley-cars came up on the still air from the valley. My friend and I looked at each other and knocked out our pipes.

I do not think that, had we been left to ourselves, we would have broken the silence for a long time. Mr. Carville's retreat had been so sudden that we could scarcely realize he was gone, that we might not see him again for perhaps two months. Time was needed, moreover, for us to adjust our feelings towards him, to comprehend fully the peculiar circumstances that, while we had been listening to the story of Rosa, she herself had been in the next house. We had to connect the Genoese maiden with the reserved and taciturn neighbour who had given us food for so many conjectures. Nor would our resentment against Mr. Carville, for breaking off so abruptly, have taken the form of speech all at once. We were too dazed. We wanted to think. We would not, I say, have broken the silence for a long time ourselves. But Miss Fraenkel's temperament was different, and in this case surprising.

With Miss Fraenkel silent thought, I imagine, is not a habit. With her to think is to speak. The effervescent enthusiasm of her nature makes speech indispensable. I do not believe that, during the two-and-a-half-hour recital of Mr. Carville, Miss Fraenkel had any coherent thoughts. More than any other women the American woman avoids the cooler levels of intellectual judgment. In one moment she stands, nude of the commonest knowledge of a person or a thing. In a moment more, and she appears before your astonished eyes, panoplied in all the glittering harness of a glowing conviction. Minerva-like, her opinions and beliefs spring full-armed from the head and front of her great Jove Intuition. Logic, says the ancient platitude, hangs by the end of a philosopher's beard; and an American woman would as soon grow hair on her face as admit reason to her soul. Therein, doubtless, lies her charm, her artless allurements, her enigmatic manner, her astonishing success.

Something of this was apparent in Miss Fraenkel as she leaned out of the window and met our gaze with delighted eyes.

"Isn't he just won-der-ful?" she exclaimed.

"You enjoyed it?" I asked.

"Oh sure! But listen. I've got a plan. Why can't you two make it into a book? It 'ud be perfectly lovely! You know, Mr. Legge, you're quite an artist, aren't you? And Mr. Pedderick here, he does some writing. Oh I'm sure you could do it! You know . . ." Miss Fraenkel made a

pause luminous with bright glances, "a picture of those two, in the café having a dinner; a real kissing picture. I'm sure she would look so sweet!"

"Ah!" said Bill, "but what's the end of the story?"

"Why sure!" faltered Miss Fraenkel. "They get—get married! That's the end of every English story, isn't it?"

Bill cackled from the kitchen, artlessly and shrill. "——and lived happy ever after!" added Miss Fraenkel, with radiant unwinking hazel eyes.

She went away after tea, to her pew in the gaunt wooden Episcopal Church in Chestnut Street, rapt in a felicitous dream of romanticism. It was nothing to her that Mr. Carville had poured diluted vitriol upon some women who clamoured for the vote, nothing that he had barely deigned to notice her existence. Once aware that he essayed to be a spell-binder, she accepted him with utter *abandon* in that rôle. She permitted him to bind the spell; and as she walked with short quick steps along Van Diemen's Avenue, her brown head held high and unswerving, I could not refrain from the fancy that she moved as one in a trance.

It was a disappointment to us that we heard the whistle of the five o'clock train before we realized that Mr. Carville was on board. The sound was the one thing needful to set our mind and tongues free to talk of him. So potent had been his atmosphere that, to be honest, we had been unable to apply judgment to his case. When we gathered at dinner the discussion was in full and amiable swing.

"It is very difficult," I said, "to distinguish the fact from the fiction, not because he is extraordinarily skilful in 'joining his flats,' but because he is so absorbed in the story himself that it would be quite inconceivable to him that anyone would *not* be interested. He has evidently never imagined such a contingency. Such ingeniousness is more than uncommon. It is sublime."

"How about your theory that he is an artist?" argued Mac. "He can't be both conscious and unconscious of his art."

"Yes, he can," I replied. "All great artists are. Mind, I don't pretend that Mr. Carville is a great artist. I merely state the fact that he has one of their attributes. I account for it this way. We have here a man of undeniable powers but limited ambition. At certain periods in his life he has been crossed by his remarkable brother, a man whom we now know to have not only brain-power, but will-power. This brother has impressed himself upon our neighbour's imagination. You noticed almost admiration in his voice at times as he spoke of his brother? It has been his whim, therefore, to accentuate as much as possible the difference between them. He has, moreover, cultivated the habit of reticence. Thrown by his profession among men of shrewd wit but imperfect delicacy of mind, he has kept himself to himself. In the course of years it has been almost necessary for him to speak. I can imagine him, a man of quick perceptions, and no mean gift of expression, finding silence becoming an agony. Much brooding

has bitten the real and fanciful details of his life into his mind. He has, quite by accident, discovered in us a singularly acceptable audience. Without conscious premeditation he has told us his story. Every narrator of the most trivial incident can induce you to listen for something naïve and individual in his utterance. Most of us disperse this quality over our days. Mr. Carville has secreted it, distilled it to a quintessence, and the result is—well, something in his tone and manner quite unusual.”

“Yes, that’s all right enough,” assented Mac, “but I still don’t quite see how his brother couples up with that chap Cecil wrote about.”

“Well, I don’t either,” I replied, “but you must remember that Mr. Carville has told us so far only of the past. In his narrative he is not married. That must be at least eight years ago, a long time in the life of a man like his brother.”

“I’ll write to Cecil,” said Bill suddenly, with one of her flashes. “Wouldn’t that be a good plan?”

“Excellent!” I exclaimed. “We ought to have thought of that before. He will be tremendously interested.”

This was a true prophecy. Some three weeks later, on a day in the middle of November, we received a bulky letter with a Wigborough postmark on a two-cent stamp. The excess, I recall, was nine cents, gladly paid by me while Bill was tearing off the end of the envelope.

“Yes,” she said, scanning the sheets quickly, “it seems to be. Here——”

We adjourned to the studio. Mac seated himself before a half-finished cover for the Christmas Number of *Payne's Monthly*, Bill took up a leather collar-bag destined to be Cecil's Yule-tide present, and I began to read.

“High Wigborough, Essex.

“MY DEAR BILL,—Many thanks for your jolly letter. I write at once to tell you how awfully interested I am in what you tell me. It really is a most extraordinary thing, though, as you know, it often happens. On the very day your letter arrived I met Carville again! Without any warning I heard the chuff-chuff of a motor in the lane, and saw him walking up to the door. I asked him in, of course. He sniffed and coughed a good bit, because I was biting a big plate, and the fumes are pretty thick even with nitric acid. He wanted to know all about what I was doing. Of course I explained, asked him to sit down and have a drink, and for a time we got on very well. I said I supposed he was touring, and he remarked:

“‘Oh, no. I’m living down here just at present.’

“‘What, broke again?’ I asked laughing. He looked at me in that fiery damn-your-eyes way of his and then joined in the laugh. ‘No,’ he said, ‘experimenting. I’ve taken up flying.’

“He said it just as you might say, ‘I’ve taken up tennis.’ He gives you the impression that if he remarked that he had taken up cathedral-building or unicorn-breeding, you would believe him. A most remarkable man!

"I said, 'Oh, I've heard something about your people, I believe, Carville,' and took up your letter. He put his whisky down on the floor (he was sitting in my low window seat) and glared at me. 'At least,' I said, frowning, you know, 'I see it's the same name.' And I went on to tell him how I'd been so impressed with my first adventure with him that I'd written to you about it. He held out his hand for the letter. I just sat and watched him. He read the whole thing rapidly, his eyes going back again and again to some parts of it; and then he gave it back to me.

"'So that's where he is, eh?' he said, and smiled. He took out a pocket-book and made a note of the address.

"'Who,' I said.

"'Charley, dear old Charley,' he said, 'I haven't seen him or heard from him for years.'

"'Then it is your brother?' I asked. He nodded.

"'He always was a bit of a duffer,' he said. 'What's N. J.?' he asked suddenly.

"'New Jersey,' I replied, 'in the United States.'

"'Oh,' said he, 'I thought it meant New Jerusalem. It would be like Charley.'

"He shut up his pocket-book and said no more about it. Cool, eh? I wanted to ask him no end of questions about his past life, but didn't care to. He was ready enough to talk of his experiments though, and asked me to go over to Mersea Island to see his shop. 'Thanks, I will some time,' I said. 'Come now!' he rapped out, and that was what I did. Took the plates out, washed my hands,

and scarcely remembered to stopper the acid-bottle. Away we went, tooling through Peldon at about seventy miles an hour. He is certainly a superb driver. Down our lane that big car of his brushed the hedge both sides, but he never slackened at all, either in his speed or his conversation. He had several wealthy people interested, he said, and he was going to do something really big in the flying line. We were nearly flying at the time. Of course, there aren't many people about this part of Essex, but it really was risky. He said this London-to-Paris and London-to-Manchester business was all 'tosh,' he was going to beat that easily. We crossed Mersea Island, turned in at a five-barred gate, and rushed up a hundred-yard plank-road that he had put down.

"It is a curious place he has there. A big shed of creosote-boards and felt roof, in the shape of a letter **L**, and at the side a small lean-to affair where he lives. One leg of the **L** is a workshop with an oil-engine to drive it; the other is for his plane, and opens at the end on the plank-road. As we came up a tall chap in a yellow leather suit all smeared with oil came out and I was introduced to his friend D'Aubigné. Can you believe it, old girl—D'Aubigné and I were in Paris together! He had a thing in the Salon the same year as I did, but having money he chucked Art and went in for motoring. We knew each other at once. It shows you what a small and sectional thing fame is, for while he had never heard of *me*, I was equally ignorant of his tremendous importance as an authority on aerial

statics. Never heard of aerial statics before, for that matter! Carville seemed quite pleased I knew D'Aubigné, and showed no hesitation in turning me over to him.

"Well, I went all over and it was really very interesting. The position seems to be this. D'Aubigné has tons of ideas and patents and can make no end of improvements in aeroplanes, but he has no nerve. Several times, he told me, he had had narrow squeaks. Now Carville, so D'Aubigné says, has a head like a gyroscope. He doesn't know what fear is. Seeing what I had of him, I can quite believe it. So having met some years ago in Venice (D'Aubigné seemed frightfully amused at something that had happened in Venice) when Carville suddenly found himself able to command a large capital, he had D'Aubigné over, and between them they are going to boom a new long-distance machine. D'Aubigné's admiration of Carville almost amounts to worship. He told me that when Carville went over his place at Avranches, he spent about ten minutes looking over a monoplane, and then climbed into the seat. 'Set it away,' he said. D'Aubigné was perplexed. 'This won't carry two,' he argued. 'No,' said Carville, 'I'm going to try it by myself. Set it away.' I have told you how domineering he is. D'Aubigné started the engine, and, so he says, crossed himself. Carville was off, and in another minute he was heading for St. Malo. D'Aubigné says some of his volplanes were agonizing to watch. When he turned he went out over the sea, but it seems this was not because he was

afraid of falling, but because he wanted to get a nearer view of a steam yacht riding off Granville. He came down on the shingle and smashed the thing badly, but he was busy studying the wreck when they came up to him. It never occurred to Carville to cross himself. D'Aubigné is a big yellow-haired Norman, and his eyes fairly goggle when he gets going on Carville. Personally I believe they've both been bad eggs in their time. When I spoke to him of your letter he pulled down the corners of his mouth and wrinkled his nose. 'Ah!' he said. 'It's quite possible. Many things happen to men like Carville. You know he was in the war with the Boers?' I said, no I didn't, and he told me that Carville had rushed to South Africa, just as thousands of others had done. He, however, had the devil's own luck; saved an officer's life, a man in the Imperial Yeomanry, named Cholme. Cholme was a pal of Belvoir's at Charterhouse. It seems Cholme gave Carville a letter to Lord Cholme, in case anything happened, you know. Something did happen and Cholme was killed at Spion Kop. Carville never got a scratch. When he came home he took the letter to Lord Cholme, and the old chap told him to ask what he liked. The old man is a pretty rough employer (he owns *The Morning*), but he had a royal way with his son. Carville said he didn't want anything, but might have a favour to ask some day. Well, it seems it was an interview with Cholme that he was after when I met him in Huntingdonshire, but he has his own ideas of the way to do

these things. He approached Lord Cholme, not with a begging-letter, but with a proposal to finance this aeroplane scheme. Cholme jumped at it, D'Aubigné says.

"We were standing in the workshop watching a young chap fitting a piece of a new engine, when we heard the roar of the aeroplane. Carville had started his engine before opening the doors. It was deafening. We got outside just in time to see him leave the ground. He made straight for the sea. D'Aubigné says he always does make straight for the sea. He may come back from over Dengie Flats or St. Osyth, but he always makes for Gunfleet and Kentish Knock Lightship at first.

"D'Aubigné went into the drawing-office where he works out his calculations and all that, and he got out a flask of Benedictine. Over this, he told me some rather startling things about Carville. D'Aubigné knows nothing about the girl you say is called Rosa, but in addition to a dozen other more shadowy creatures, he says there is a Gladys not far off, a thin girl of about thirty. Of course, D'Aubigné is a Frenchman and takes the French view, but it certainly seems to be a fact that Carville makes a hobby of women.

"Since then I have seen him frequently. Sometimes he and D'Aubigné come over to tea with me, and if I would let them they would take me for long spins across England. They work in spurts, and then shut the place up for a day and tear round the country. Once I heard the roar of a car, and

looked out in time to see Carville rush past, and there was undoubtedly a girl with him. Once, too, I saw him in the air, far away over Layer Marney, going towards Colchester. D'Aubigné says their machine will be ready soon. As far as I can make out, whatever they do, *The Morning* is to have exclusive information.

"Do you know, it suddenly struck me that an aeroplane lends itself extraordinarily well to etching? Carville missed the plank-road one day in landing, and I saw the machine lying with a list in the field near a rick. I made some notes, and when it is finished I'll pull a proof and send it to you. I fancy it will be rather good. In the clear transparent afternoon light of a late October day, with the rick behind it, the great vans sprawled out over the hedge, the corrugations of the engine, the thin lines—— Do you see it? I think very highly of it. An aeroplane has a personality, like Carville.

"Well, now you must send me news of your side. I wish I could tell you what he is going to do, but D'Aubigné says that is a secret. One thing he has told me, and that is that they are going to fit the machine with a wireless telephone so that he can talk to *The Morning* office while he is flying. Wonders will never cease!

"I like Mac's colour prints. The effect of the sky over the steamer is quite topping. Where painting in oil on a copper plate seems to fail is in the detail. The colour spreads so. The red port light of the vessel is much too large. However, I

shall certainly spoil some paper trying to out-do Mac.

“Kind regards to all. Write soon,

“Yours ever,

“CECIL.”

As I folded up the sheets and thrust them into the envelope, Mac looked across at me. Seeing that I had no inkling of his thought he remarked with some slight irritation:

“Wonder when the deuce that chap’s coming back?”

“Where’s he gone?” asked Bill, holding up the collar bag to see the effect.

We did not even know that.

“Oh,” I said, “Mediterranean, I suppose.”

To us the Mediterranean is a far-off beautiful dream. We sat trying to visualize for ourselves the incredible fate of visiting the Mediterranean as we might take the cars for Broadway. I heard Bill sigh softly. Mac’s voice, when he spoke, was gruff.

“I’d ask the kids if I were you,” he said.

“I can do that,” I agreed dreamily.

Sometimes, it must be admitted, we get homesick. It generally happens when we have letters from home. We felt rather keenly then, the shrewd poignancy of Mr. Carville’s description of himself as an alien. But to us it implied a subdued if passionate desire to see again the quiet landscape of England. The painter-cousin’s sketch of the aeroplane near a rick, sunk in the ditch by a hedge,

in the clear transparent afternoon light of late October, appealed to us. To see a quickset hedge again . . . we sighed.

No doubt we would have allowed the daily flow and return of life's business to oust our neighbours' fortunes from our minds, and waited patiently for Mr. Carville's reappearance, had not a most exciting game of cow-boys, a game in which I for the nonce was a fleeing Indian brave, led to an abrupt encounter with Mrs. Carville. Benvenuto Cellini's scalp already hung at my girdle, visible as a pocket-handkerchief; and he lay far down near the cabbages, to the imaginative eye a writhing and disgusting spectacle. The intrepid Giuseppe Mazzini, however, had thrown his lariat about me with no mean adroitness, and I was down and captured. This thrilling *dénouement* was enacted near the repaired fence, and any horror I may have simulated was suddenly made real by the appearance of Mrs. Carville, who had been feeding her fowls. When one is prone on the grass, a clothes-line drawn tight about one's arms, and a triumphant cow-boy of eight years in the very act of placing his foot on one's neck, it is difficult to look dignified. The sudden intrusion of an unsympathetic personality will banish the romantic illusion.

It may be that the sombre look in Mrs. Carville's face was merely expressive of a doubt of my sanity. For a grown man to be playing with two little boys at three o'clock of a Tuesday afternoon, may have seemed bizarre enough in her view. To me, however, endeavouring to disengage myself from my

conqueror and assume an attitude in keeping with my age and reputation, her features were ominously shadowed by displeasure.

"If I disturbed you," I said courteously, "I am sorry."

She put her hand on the paling and the basket slid down her arm. She seemed to be pondering whether I had disturbed her or no, eyeing me reflectively. Ben came up, no longer a scalped and abandoned cowboy, but a delighted child. Perhaps the trust and frank *camaraderie* of the little fellow's attitude towards me affected her, for her face softened.

"It's all right," she replied slowly. "You must not let them trouble you. They make so much noise."

"No, no," I protested. "I enjoy it. I am fond of children, very fond. They are nice little boys."

They stood on either side of me, clutching at my coat, subdued by the conversation.

"You have not any children?" she asked, looking at them. I shook my head.

"I am a bachelor," I replied, "I am sorry to say."

"That accounts for it," she commented, raising her eyes to mine. I agreed.

"Possibly," I said. "None the less I like them. I suppose," I added, "they ought to be at school."

"There is measles everywhere in the school," she informed me. "I do not want it yet."

"Mr. Carville," I said, seizing an opening, "told me he did not believe in school."

"That is right," she answered. "He don't see the use of them. Nor me," she concluded thoughtfully.

"That is a very unusual view," I ventured.

"How?" she asked vaguely.

"Most people," I explained, "think school a very good thing."

"It costs nothing," she mused and her hand fell away from the paling. The two little boys ran off, intent on a fresh game. I scanned her face furtively, appreciative of the regular and potent modelling, the pure olive tints, the pose and poise of the head. Indubitably her face was dark; the raven hair that swept across her brow accentuated the gloom slumbering in her eyes. One unconsciously surmised that somewhere within her life lay a region of unrest, a period of passion not to be confused with the quiet courtship described by her husband.

"True," I assented. "By the way, is Mr. Carville due in port soon?" She turned her head and regarded me attentively.

"No," she said. "Do you wish to see him?"

"Oh, not particularly," I hastened to say. "He was telling us some of his experiences at sea, you know. It was very interesting."

"I do not like the sea," she said steadily. "It made me sick . . ."

"So it did me. But I enjoy hearing about foreign lands; Italy, for instance."

"This is all right," Mrs. Carville replied in the same even tone. "Here."

"And he will be back soon?" I said, reverting to Mr. Carville.

"Saturday he says; but it may not be till Monday. If bad weather Monday . . . Tuesday . . . I cannot tell."

"I see," I said. "I hope we shall see him then. He was telling us . . ." I paused. It occurred to me that she would hardly care to be apprised of what her husband had been telling us—"of his early life," I ended lamely.

"Of me?" She asked the question with eyes gazing out toward the blue ridge of the Orange Mountains, without curiosity or anger. I felt sheepish.

"Something," I faltered. She turned once more to glance in my direction. I was surprised at the mildness of her expression. Almost she smiled. At any rate her lips parted.

"He is a good man," she said softly, and added as she turned away, "Good afternoon."

CHAPTER XI

MR. CARVILLE SEES THREE GREEN LIGHTS

AS happens on occasion the weather changed with dramatic suddenness in the last week in November. One might almost imagine that our august emperor of the seasons, the Indian Summer, protracting his reign against all the wishes of the gods, stirring up the implacable bitterness and hatred of winter, had gone down suddenly in ruin and death. I remember well the evening of the change. I had spent a tiring day in New York, working gradually up Broadway as far as Twenty-third Street. Seen through the windows of the Jersey City ferryboat, the prow-like configuration of lower Manhattan seemed to be plunging stubbornly against the gale of sleet that was tearing up from the Narrows. The hoarse blast of the ferry-whistle was swept out of hearing, the panes resounded with millions of impacts as the sleet, like thin iron rods, drove against them. An ignoble impulse led me to join the scurrying stampede of commuters towards the warmth and shelter of the waiting-room. There is something personally hostile in a blizzard. In the earthquake at San Francisco there was a giant playfulness in the power that shook the brick front from our frame-house and revealed our intimate privacies to a heedless mob. There was a feeling there, even at the worst, when the slow shuddering rise of the earth

changed to a swift and soul-shattering subsidence, a feeling that one was yet in the hands of God. But in a blizzard one apprehends an anger puny and personal. There is no sublimity in defying it; one runs to the waiting-room. And once there, nodding to Confield, who sat in a corner nursing his cosmopolitan bag, pressing through the little crowd about the news-stand, I found myself urging my body past a man wearing a Derby hat and smoking a corn-cob pipe. I had a momentary sense of gratification that even a seasoned seafarer like Mr. Carville should feel no shame in taking shelter from the inclement weather.

"Good evening, sir," he said imperturbably. "Homeward bound?"

"Sure," I said, putting down a cent and taking up the *Manhattan Mail*, an evening journal of modest headlines. "I suppose you are coming out, too?"

"Yes," he said, as we turned away, "I've come up from the ship. We only got in this morning."

"You are late," I agreed. "Mrs. Carville said you might be in on Saturday, and here it is Wednesday."

He gave me a quick glance.

"Oh! Did she tell you? Yes, we had several bad days after passing Fastnet. The Western ocean is bad all over just now."

"I suppose you were sorry to leave the Mediterranean."

"It was Bremerhaven this time," he replied, striking a match. "Near Hamburg, you know. They change us about now and again."

"What is your cargo?" I asked.

"I thought you knew," he said, surprised. "I'm on the *Raritan*, an oil-tank. Standard Oil, you know. I quite thought you knew."

"I had intended to ask you," I said, "but it is a delicate subject. One cannot very well ferret for details of a stranger's business."

"That's the genteel view, I know," he said, smiling. "There's something to be said for it, too."

"You will come in and finish your story?" I ventured.

"Well, I did think of looking in some time . . ."

"After dinner to-night?"

"Much obliged. It passes the time."

We went out and climbed into the Paterson express. We are rather proud of this train in a way, for it is the only one of the day which confines itself to stations when contemplating a stop. I narrated to Mr. Carville an incident of the preceding winter when a commuter of Hawthorne, on our line, stepping out one snowy night, found himself clinging to the trestles of the bridge over the Pasayack River, and the train vanishing into the darkness. Mr. Carville laughed at this, and remarked jocosely that he was "safer at sea." We discussed for some time the comparative merits of English and American railroads, Mr. Carville expressing the fairly shrewd opinion that "conditions so different made any comparison out of the question."

"After all," he remarked, "leaving out London, which has more people in it than Canada and

Venezuela put together, what *is* England? From an American point of view, I mean. Simply Maryland!"

I appreciated this. Often during my sojourn in America, I had pored over maps and vainly endeavoured to form some conception of so gigantic a territory. I had failed. I had come to the conclusion that minds nurtured in the insular atmosphere were forever incapable of visualizing a continent. In my fugitive letters to friends at home I had been reduced to the astronomer's facile illustrations. "Just as," I had written in despair—"just as a railway train, travelling at a mile a minute, takes nearly 180 years to reach the sun, so we, travelling in a tourist car at rather less than a mile a minute, took an apparently interminable period to reach the sun of California!" It was a poor jest, but excusable one whose clothes, ears, mouth, eyes and nose were full of cinder-dust, excusable in a disdainful Britisher so far from home. To Englishmen, who had never seen a grade-crossing, a desert, or a mountain, and for whom a short night-journey on smooth rock-balasted lines suffices to take them from one end of their country to the other, my figure was vague enough, no doubt. Some day, when I go back, I shall try to explain.

"Yes," I said, "exactly—Maryland."

I was more than ever reinforced in my already-expressed opinion that Mr. Carville was a man of more ability than ambition. There was to me something bizarre in his deliberate abstention from any contact, save books, with the larger intellectual

sphere to which he by right belonged. His naïve confession of culture showed that he was aware of his latent power, but I was not sure whether he had ever realized the stern law by which organs become atrophied by disuse. We had reached our station and were struggling up Pine Street through rain and wind before I ventured to hint at my concern.

"Ah!" he said. "I daresay you're right in a way. But——" The wind blew his voice away, so that he seemed to be speaking through the telephone, "——I've a family to think of."

We parted at the door, and I hurried to tell the news to my friends. They smiled when I spoke of Mr. Carville.

"We've had news, too," said Bill, helping me to spinach. "A paper from Cecil."

"Copy of *The Morning*," added Mac. It is a rule of the house that there be no papers on the table, so I possessed my soul in patience until after dinner. My cigar going well, and Mac thundering the "Soldiers' Chorus," from *Faust*, on the piano, I opened the paper which Bill handed to me. To be honest, I was a little startled. The chief item on the news page was headed:

AEROPHONE MESSAGE FROM CARVILLE;
OVER HELIGOLAND; ALARM IN GERMANY.

Copyright by The London "Morning."

The special article of the day was headed: "The Napoleon of the Air; a Character Sketch," and

the leader, signed by Lord Cholme himself, was a pæan, in stilted journalese, in praise of the *Morning's* enterprise in encouraging invention.

"The Empire," wrote Lord Cholme, "can no longer afford to pass by one of her most brilliant sons. In the light of his magnificent achievement, the daring of a Peary, the nerve of a Shackleton, the indomitable persistence of a Marconi, dwindle and fade. We do not hesitate to say that since the capture of Gibraltar, the Empire has secured no such chance for consolidating her paramountcy in Europe. The present is no time for hesitation or delay. Mr. Carville is master of the situation. By his message from the air, three thousand feet above Heligoland, in full view of German territory, to the office of *The Morning*, he has demonstrated the efficiency of his machine. If that is not sufficient, Mr. Carville's next journey will convince Europe, if not England. If the pettifogging Radical Government turn a deaf ear to our brilliant correspondent, if they ignore his claims and chaffer in any commercial spirit with his accredited agents, their days are numbered. It is hardly too much to say that the days of the Empire are also numbered . . ."

Apart from our own private interest in the affair, the news did not thrill. In America one's withers are unwrung by such scares. The "exclusiveness" of Lord Cholme's information, indeed, defeated his object. Lord Cholme, I knew, was loved neither in Fleet Street nor in Park Place. His ruthless

competition with the news agencies, his capture of numerous cable-routes, had gradually divided England into two classes: those who read *The Morning* and those who didn't. Everyone remembers the exclusive description of the destruction of Constantinople in *The Morning*. No one was surprised to find that the following day Constantinople was still alive and well. Clever young Oxford men who had not succeeded in getting a post on *The Morning*, satirized the paper in other journals who never paid more than two guineas a column. No doubt, having been a newspaper man myself, I discounted the effect of the scare upon the public. I could imagine the delicate raillery of the other papers, if indeed they deigned to notice Lord Cholme's exclusive information at all.

The special biography was as accurate as such biographies usually are. It was written in a fair imitation of Mr. Kipling's racy colloquial style and contained numerous references to the Empire, the White Man's Burden and our "far-flung battle line." I suspected that Monsieur D'Aubigné had supplied the basic "facts" which had been edited by Lord Cholme before being handed on to "Vol-Plane," as the biographer called himself.

I set the paper down and resumed my cigar. The drums and tramlings of Lord Cholme's organ had revealed nothing fresh. I understand now why my friends had merely mentioned the fact of its arrival and made no comment. After all, our real interest lay in the man, not in his aeroplane. We had never seen an aeroplane except in the

cinema films, but we were familiar enough with current events to feel no surprise that a man had flown over the North Sea. I think I expressed our mutual sentiment when I observed that Cecil's story of how Frank Carville won his bet, and Mr. Carville's own account of the voyage from the Argentine to Genoa, told us far more about the man than "Vol-Plane's" highly-paid hack-work.

We had been but a few minutes in the studio before Mr. Carville knocked and Mac ran down to admit him. We heard the rumble of voices while our visitor discarded his coat; comments on "the change," and then footsteps on the stairs. I went to the door to welcome him.

He was standing on the landing, appraising with a quick eye the Kakemonos and prints that covered the distempered walls. We are rather proud of our "Japs," as Bill calls them. I even tried to learn something of the language from the "boy" who was our servant in San Francisco. He was not a scholarly boy, and he told lies in English, so that it is possible his tuition was of no value. I remember Bill was ironic because, when Nakamura was dismissed in ignominy, and wrote on the kitchen wall for the benefit of his successor, I was unable to decipher the message.

"Do you care for this sort of thing?" said Mac. "That's original," pointing to a fine Hiroshige.

"I used to," replied Carville, feeling for his pipe. "I was a good while in that trade—coal from Moji to Singapore. I think they're best at a distance though—the people, I mean."

Mac protested against this "narrow" view.

"Yes, yes, I know," said Mr. Carville, coming into the studio. "I read Lafcadio Hearn when I was younger; read him again out in Japan. Humph!"

Whether his characteristic ejaculation referred to Hearn or the studio I cannot determine. His interest was obvious, but it was interest, not of a connoisseur, but of a man looking round another man's workshop. Von Roon used to say in Chelsea, "There is hope for him who looks with attention upon his neighbour's tools." Mr. Carville sank slowly into a chair, his eyes fixed upon a recent nude study.

"We haven't any Scotch, but if you care for Rye ——" said Mac, reaching for a tray on the throne.

Mr. Carville's eye lost its vague, reflective expression as it fell upon the tray.

"Ah?" he said, "I'd rather have good Rye than——than——well, you know what most of the Scotch is here. No—no water, thanks. I take it as I find it."

It was a new facet of his character, this. We watched him swallow the neat spirit at a gulp and place the empty glass on the tray without emotion. Mac and I sipped gently and waited for Mr. Carville to begin.

"I've been rather worried just lately, with one thing and another," he observed, putting away his little brass tobacco-box. "Second went home to get married last trip, and the Third, promoted, you understand, needs an eye. Very willing and all that, but he's been in these big hotel-ships,

Western ocean all his life, and as I say, he needs an eye. I was telling you about my brother, if I remember."

We murmured that he had, and watched Mr. Carville's obvious enjoyment of his pipe.

"Ah!" he said, "the Brignole station in Genoa. Humph!"

"You see, my brother has something in his make-up that appeals to a woman. I was going to say, all women. There's something spectacular, you might say, in the way he carries on. I've never been able to decide whether it's intentional or just fate. Anyhow, there it is; and if you look at it in that light, it isn't so very wonderful after all that a girl like Rosa was then should have been dazzled and carried away. When she jumped up and stood staring at me, I hardly knew what to do. 'Rosa!' I said, and we stood facing each other for a while. I don't know; but I think we got to know each other better just then. For me, at any rate, it was a revelation. They say a drowning man sees all his past life while the water is pressing on his eardrums. Something like that happened to me then in that dismal, badly-lighted booking-hall. It wasn't love, in the sugary sentimental sense, that I felt for Rosa; but a blind, helpless sort of an emotion, a feeling that if I didn't get her I was lost—lost! I put out my hands as though I was catching hold of something to hold me up . . . I felt her hands.

"I can hardly remember how we went away from there. I know the driver shouted to me as

we came out and I went up and paid him. And then we were in the *Piazza Corvetto*, sitting on a seat, near where the trolley-cars stop. How long we sat there I don't know either. I knew I'd got her again. She was there, alongside, and we were talking, like two children. I was very glad . . . you know."

He paused, and we went on smoking and sipping, and Bill bent her head over her needlework. I thought with a sudden and revealing vividness of the woman who had said to me, in her gentle Italian voice, "He is a good man." I think we were very glad too, though we did not say so.

"I can't tell you," he went on evenly, "whether my brother intended to take her away with him and was prevented by some accident, or whether he had changed his mind. I think he intended to. I can tell you what I did myself. Before I left Genoa I married Rosa. She wanted it. She did not trust herself. There are men like that. Women cannot trust themselves unless some man will trust them.

"When we sailed out of Genoa bound for Buenos Ayres, I was a married man, and Rosa had a flat in *Via Palestro*. I thought I knew my brother well enough to feel sure that I needn't fear him any more. That's the strange part of a business like that. To Rosa, to me, it was life or death; to my brother it was the amusement of a few hours, days, perhaps a week. It's a queer world.

"I think it was about two years after that before I saw my brother again. When the war in South

Africa started we were outward bound in ballast for Buenos Ayres. At Monte Video we received orders to go to Rosario and load remounts for Cape Town. It was a big business; I believe the owners built three new ships out of the profits of that charter. When we got up the river those bony Argentine cattle were waiting for us and run aboard in a few hours. No time for boilers or overhauling engines or anything. Straight out again, due east, with a crowd of the toughest cattle-men I ever saw before or since. There was no peace or quiet on the ship at all. They were not professional cattle-deck tenders at all, you see. They only took the job to get to the Cape, where the trouble was. Most of them deserted and drifted up country. Each trip we had to get a fresh team. I can't say I enjoyed my life very much during that charter. It was hard luck, though nothing out of the way for a sailor-man, to go off the Genoa run now I was married, and had a wife there.

"I saw my brother soon after Cronje was captured at Paardeberg. I was ashore in Cape Town one evening taking a walk with the Second, just to get out of sight of the ship for an hour, when he pulls my sleeve and says he:

"'I say, Chief, you remember that new mess-man you got in B. A.? That Lord? Well, ain't that him over there. You remember, don't you? That chap who won the lottery in Genoa that time. Look!' He pointed across the street to a party of chaps in khaki walking along and slapping their legs with their canes. The tallest man and the

finest-looking of the lot was my brother. I couldn't be mistaken, though it would be difficult to say exactly why. It was his air.

"He did not see me, but I turned away and went into the first saloon for a drink. I wanted to be away from him and I wanted a drink. I had a panicky feeling about him. While the Second recalled all the incidents of 'that new mess-man's' career on board, I was thinking that perhaps we were destined to cross each other all our lives, that go where I would, I shouldn't be able to avoid him. You see how a man's imagination will run away with him. I ought to have thanked God he was in South Africa and likely to get himself shot fighting for his country instead of going after women. When I was safe aboard the ship again I began to see how I had been frightened. For it was fright and nothing else that turned me into that saloon to avoid my brother. I thought of him rushing up to the Brignole station at the last second and looking round for Rosa, and finding her gone. He would know I'd had something to do with it. He would swear to find her some day, swear in one of his hot, short passions, passions like a West India hurricane that whips and crashes and smashes everything around for a minute or two.

"I used to think a lot about him on the voyage back to Buenos Ayres. I don't know what he was in, in the war, though the Second, whose brother was a driver in the Artillery, said he was in the Mounted Infantry uniform. Everybody was Mounted Infantry in those days. To me it seemed

strange that Frank should go out to the war, but I've come to the conclusion he really felt the call. There was the excitement too. The old bad Irish blood comes out in the love of a row.

"In Buenos Ayres I had a letter from Aunt Rebecca. Rosa had a baby, but it was dead as soon as born. The old woman said I'd better come home. I remember walking up and down the bridge-deck that night, thinking things out under the stars. I knew Rosa would like to go to England. They hear so much about *Inghilterra* in Italy. For them it is a land where lords and ladies walk about the streets and give pennies to poor people all day long. Then again, I was not only in need of a holiday, but I was able to afford one if I was careful and kept down expenses. To take a holiday in England, with Rosa! To see it as though it was all fresh! The fancy took strong hold of me. I saw myself going through St. Paul's, the Tower, Monument and Westminster Abbey, as an alien. I saw the hungry landlady in the Bloomsbury boarding-house trying to rook me. 'Bloomsburys' have a very bad name in Italy among educated people. I read an article in the *Stampa*—very humorous it was. Humph!

"I talked it over with the Skipper next day. It is a strange thing to me how men value one sentiment and underrate another. If I'd gone to the Old Man and said, 'I want to go home, Captain, and see my wife,' he would have asked me if I was crazy. But as soon as I said—showing him the black-edged letter—that the kid was dead,

he pulled a long face and said he'd see the agents at once. I wrote to my old uncle in London explaining matters. The Second got his step and they got a new Fourth off a meat-boat of the company's that was loading at the time. When I was paid off I took my dunnage and bought me a second-class ticket for Genoa on a Rubattino boat.

"To a certain extent I had no reason to be dissatisfied with my success in life. Many a man has done worse at thirty-three. I was married; I had money in the bank; I could eat and drink and sleep well; I enjoyed reading and smoking. Beyond that, I have grown to think a man need not go. For you gentlemen, of course, it's different. You are out for fame. You work at high and low pressure, whereas I work in a vacuum, so to speak. I thought a good deal about life on that voyage to Genoa as a passenger. It was a new experience to me, I can tell you. For the first day or two I was lost. There seemed nothing to do. I'd walk up and down the promenade deck listening to the beat of the twin-engines, wondering if the Second was a good man . . . habit, you see? And then I found a little library abaft the smoking-room full-up with leather-bound books that nobody wanted to read. They were Italian, of course, for it was an Italian ship, and it struck me that I'd have some fun rubbing up my knowledge of the language. For let me tell you that colloquial Genoese doesn't take you very far into Dante or Boccaccio! I think that was one reason why Rosa had disliked the idea of living in Italy. Although

I didn't notice it much, being a foreigner, her speech was not refined. How could it be, down on the Via Milano with Rebecca for a teacher? Well, I started in and every day I worked my way through a chapter or two. Perhaps it is because I know modern Italian writing so well—for a foreigner—that I don't take much stock in all these great men English and Americans boom so. They seem to me smart Alecks, but the high-pressure men are Latins. I can't help thinking, after reading the modern men, that they are like the transformers in an electric power-plant. The Latins are the generators of ideas, and these other chaps are transformers. They reduce the voltage, lose a lot in leakage, but are useful because they make the current available to the small man. It's a rather technical illustration, but that's what I mean.

"Two men, or two books if you like, took a great hold of me on that voyage—Mazzini's *Duties of Man* and Cellini's *Life*. I suppose they are about as far apart as any two books—or men—could get. You may laugh at the notion, but I found myself in sympathy with both! Mazzini appealed to my mind, Cellini to my imagination. If Ruskin had stuck to his last as Mazzini did, he might have made a revolution in England. I'm not a Socialist, never was, any more than Mazzini, and there was something fine to me about the way he told these boiling, ignorant, weak-minded mobs of Italian workmen that they had duties as well as rights. There's too much talk of rights nowadays. Anybody would think that because a man works with

his hands and takes wages, he's free to do as he pleases. I remember the Old Man once when I had trouble with a fireman. 'All I want is justice!' says the man, putting his dirty hand on the chart-room door. 'Justice!' roars the Old Man. 'By God, you dirty bone-headed Liverpool Irishman, if you had justice you'd be in irons, that's where you'd be.' Humph!

"I think I took to Cellini because in a way he reminded me of my brother. He got away with it every time! The idea of doing anything, or not doing anything, because it was against the law or custom, never entered his head! Very few people who read Cellini realize that there are men like him now. Every bit. They don't write about themselves, that's all. There will always be a certain number of men of his kidney, a sort of seasoning for the rest of us. They fear nothing and they reverence nothing . . . Strong men!

"All day and every day I'd sit away astern reading these books, and gradually an idea took shape in my mind. It was this. It was my duty to have a family, since my brother had turned out so. More than that, it was my duty to give them a chance, when they came. I could not see how I was to do that in England. I can't see it now. England to me is on the crumble. Emigration has dug away the outside of the walls and revolution is digging away inside. For men like Belvoir, men who have been to public-schools and Oxford, and have a private income, it will be comfortable enough for a long time to come. But it is on the crumble.

When I thought of my children I never pictured them grown up in that genteel snobbish life that I'd been brought up in. No!

"And I knew that Rosa still had her dislike of Italy. What should we do? Suddenly it occurred to me that since my father had come from America, I could go back there. I believe in this country, and it's going on ten years since I first came. There's something *electric* in the air over here, a feeling that things grow. My boys will have a chance here . . . I think.

"That was one part of the idea. The other was to name my boys after those two men. It may be only fancy, but I think names have an influence, you know. A father's fancy—let it go at that! I'd like somehow to have one of my boys an artist, and watch him grow. I used to dream about the future on that lazy voyage to Genoa. Every man does at times. Pipe-dreams, you know.

"Rosa was out and about when I reached the Via Palestro. She fell in at once with my plan to take a trip to England. We stopped at Paris for a day or two to look round and buy things, and then on to London. I found a quiet little private boarding establishment in Tavistock Square, where we lived cheap and comfortable. A penny bus took us almost anywhere. I'd been fancying myself with Rosa going about as a stranger, and if you'll believe me it was almost a fact! London had changed very much since I'd been in Victoria Street. You'll notice that if you go back now. Same as New York; one can hardly recognize some parts

of it now. I did enjoy that time. Rosa was so pleased with everything she saw. It was May, you see; London in May. We used to go down to Chelsea and watch the boats on the river, and see the people in the grand houses on the embankment, going out in their automobiles.

“Gradually the idea that my brother would come across me again got fainter and I didn’t encourage it. I heard nothing of him. My uncle, who had retired, down at Surbiton, told me he had not seen him for years. We agreed that it was best to leave him to his own devices. I didn’t take Rosa down. Somehow I didn’t see her catching on to my uncle and cousins. They were a little too genteel for her.

“For the same reason I didn’t take her to Clifford’s Inn when I went to see Miss Flagg, the woman Gladys had lived with. Miss Flagg was there, much the same as before, with her flat and peculiar furniture and her untidy dress. She was so glad to see me and hoped I’d got another book to print. Humph! She told me she didn’t see Gladys very often nowadays; had a flat of her own in Fulham. My brother had crooked his finger, and away she ran. Miss Flagg told me all about it, how Gladys had taken to paint—on her face I mean—and gone to the devil generally. I’ll say this for Miss Flagg, she never used anything to add to her beauty, much as she needed it. We were going on very nicely when I happened to mention I was married, and all the light went out of Miss Flagg’s face. She was finished with me. You see, even when they’re after votes, they’re just the

same. I left her and took Rosa to the Zoo in the afternoon. I enjoyed that, and so did she.

"After about three months of this sort of thing, I began to hanker for the sea again. You may wonder at that, but it's a fact. It grows on men, me for one. I felt lost without the beat of the engine, you know. So I applied for several jobs, and finally the builders of the ship I'm on now, the *Raritan*, wanted a chief to take her out to New York. I got the job and we went to Sunderland to join her. Since then I've been crossing and re-crossing the Western Ocean. And speaking in a general way, that's all there is to it."

Mr. Carville, pinching his shaven chin with a thumb and fore-finger, looked down meditatively at his boots. In some subtle way his manner belied his words. I felt a lively conviction that there was in a particular way something more to it. It seemed quite incredible that he had no more to tell us of his brother.

"Surely," I said, "you have heard of your brother since?"

He gave me a quick look.

"That's right," he said. "I have. I was going to tell you about it. I saw him, fifteen days ago, in the North Sea."

"Great Scott, did you really?" exclaimed Mac, and he picked up the copy of *The Morning*. "Look here!"

Mr. Carville took the paper and read the news without exhibiting any emotion. I saw his eye-lid flicker as he glanced down the special article by

"Vol-Plane." Lord Cholme's concern for the Empire seemed to leave him cold.

"Humph!" he remarked and handed the paper to Mac, remaining lost in thought for a moment.

"Ah!" he said at length. "That certainly accounts for him. But it doesn't say anything about the three green lights."

"What green lights?" I asked, little thinking that I should see these same lights myself in the near future.

"I'll tell you," said he, and looked round for a place to knock out his pipe. I passed him the ash-bowl that Mac brought back from Mexico when he went down there to do a bird's-eye view for a mining company. Mr. Carville held it up to examine the crude red and blue daub on the pale glaze.

"I suppose," he began, "that of all the meetings I've had with my brother, this last one was the most unusual. It was unusual enough, that time in the *Parque Colon*, when he grabbed my neck in the dark; but this last meeting beats that, I think. It's funny how a quiet, respectable man like me should have such experiences, isn't it?"

"I ought to explain that the *Raritan*, like all oil tank steamers, has her engines aft. The captain and mates live amidships under the bridge, while we engineers all live in the poop, under the quarter-deck, as they call it in the Navy. There is a long gangway between the two houses, but as a general thing we live apart. We have our own pantry and steward and we can go straight out of our berths into the engine-room without coming on deck at all.

“It was the second night after we left Bremerhaven that this happened and about ten minutes after eight bells, midnight. I keep the eight to twelve watch with the Fourth, you see, and it often happens that I don’t feel like turning in right away. It was a clear yet dark night without a ripple on the sea. It had been one of those calm days that we have in English waters in winter time, a pale sun shining through a light haze, cold yet pleasant. I’d seen the Third tumble down the ladder and heard the Fourth put his door on the hook. Down below there was the quick thump of the engines, the rattle of the ashes being shovelled into the ejector, and the click of oil-cup lids as the Third went round the bearings. Everything seemed in fair trim for a quiet night. I walked up and down the deck for a spell, finishing my pipe, and then I was standing by the stern light, an electric fixed on the after side of the scuttle. A good way to the westward was the Kentish Knock Lightship. I was leaning against the bulkhead, smoking and thinking of things in general, you may say, and wondering what the Second would do next, when I saw three green lights, very low on our starboard quarter. I don’t think I was much struck by them at first. Might have been a trawler. The Second Mate told me afterwards that after the Old Man had gone down he saw a green light and thought it was the Harwich and Hook-of-Holland mail-boat. He was half asleep or he’d have wondered where her mast-lights were. I took very little notice, I say, until it struck me that, so far from being a

trawler, those lights were moving a good deal faster than a mail-boat. Sometimes I could see only one light. I began to wonder what it was and I stepped down to my room to get my binoculars. I remember the mess-room was dark, and across the table and floor was a narrow bar of light from the Fourth's door. As I came up the stairs I heard a peculiar droning sound, as though the Third had let the dynamo run away. I turned round intending to go down below, when I saw the green lights coming up fast . . . fast.

As "As my foot touched the deck the wings were overhead and I saw the long body and flat tail. To me, for I'd never seen an aeroplane close before, it was a wonderful sight. I put the glasses up and watched it slide away in the dark, dropping until it seemed to skim the water. 'So that's an aeroplane!' I said to myself. And I saw it wheel round and the green lights came into view again, rising, I remember. I was a bit excited and leaned over the stern rail. I had never realized before how a man might feel while flying. I'd always looked at the pictures as rather Jules Verney, you might say; improbable and far-fetched. But here it was, coming up on us again, much more wonderful than any picture! We were doing about twelve knots, and I suppose that machine was coming up at thirty. Just above the big triangle of three green lights was a blue spark snapping, and in the shadow between the wings the shape of a man. I stood there watching, watching, feeling nervous because of that peculiar drone that the propeller made,

when all of a sudden it stopped and the whole thing swooped down to within twenty feet of the awning-spars. I stepped back a little and looked straight up. In the wink of an eye he was gone, but I saw him, and he me. As he swerved away to clear the funnels, I heard him give a great shout of laughter that rose to a small scream: "*Pon—soul—it's—Char—ley!*" he sang out, and dropped away astern. I heard his engine begin again, a note like an insect; and he fled away towards Gunfleet. And that was all!

"I stood there dazed for a moment. In spite of the suddenness of it, I don't think I had any doubt it was my brother. I saw his big hook nose sticking out of his fur cap between the horrible goggles, his body craning forward under the wings. And the voice, the wailing, sneering, screaming laugh, '*Charley!*'—that was him right enough. My brother!

"I stepped along the gangway to the bridge, just as the Second Mate took the telescope from his eye and laid it in the rack. He saw me and leaned over the rail beckoning.

"*"Say, Mister Chief, what the blazes was that?"* he whispered.

"*"Didn't you see it?"* I asked. I knew he had been dozing on the lee side of the chart-room.

"*"See it! I heard something!"* he says. '*Was it you calling Charley?*' His name's Charley, you see; Charley Phillips.

"*"No,"* I said. '*I didn't see anything. You must have been asleep, Mr. Phillips.*'

“He looked at me, rather raw about the gills, took a look at the Gunfleet Light and bent down again to me.

“‘Did you *see* anything?’ He waved his hand towards the Essex coast. ‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Green lights.’

“‘Oh, that was the Harwich boat,’ he says. ‘I know that. She’s gone. Must have been going twenty-two knots.’

“‘It was an aeroplane,’ I said, whispering, ‘flew past.’

“‘*Eh!*’ says he. I said it again. He straightens up and takes a turn up and down the bridge.

“‘You’d better watch out,’ I said. ‘It may come back.’

“‘I *am* watching out!’ says he, rather savage. ‘I’ll take care of all the aeroplanes about, Chief.’

“I went back then and took another look round with my glasses, but I saw nothing but a couple of coasting steamers in shore. I stepped down into the mess-room and looked through the slit of the Fourth’s door. Funny coincidence! He was on his settee in his pyjamas, asleep, and on his stomach was a magazine he’d been reading, a magazine with a coloured cover showing an aeroplane dropping a bursting shell on a man-o’-war.

“I lay awake for a long time, listening to the bells, watching Rosa’s picture flickering on the bulkhead as the screw below me shook the ship. So we’d met again! I couldn’t blame the Second Mate—I’ve kept the grave-yard watch myself; I couldn’t blame Mister Charley Phillips. But what

would he have said if I'd told him my brother was on that machine? What if I'd said I'd seen wireless sparks spitting above it? Humph!

"I suppose I must have dozed a little, for the next thing I remember was the whoop of our siren and the engines going dead slow. As I tumbled out to go down it was three o'clock. The Third was standing by the reversing gear and I saw by the vacuum gauge that the temperature of the sea was down to forty-eight degrees. 'Fog, sir?' says the Third. 'Aye,' I said. 'Shut your injection a little. We're off the Goodwins, I suppose.' Everything was all right, so I climbed up to look. The Old Man was out on deck and they were heaving the lead. Every minute the siren gave a mournful whoop and the slow thump of the propeller made me miserable. I leaned over the side, thinking of my brother and his aeroplane. For the life of me I couldn't be sure it wasn't all a dream. The thin whine of the siren sounded very like his cry of '*Charley!*' I heard the Old Man bark something, heard the tinkling of the telegraph and the siren bellowed again. We were going full speed astern! Just as I turned away from the bulwarks I saw a green light, the starboard light of a coaster, rush past. I could hear some one shouting through a megaphone on the bridge. She must have been awful close—went past our stern with an inch to spare as we swung. And then all was quiet again as the engines stopped and went ahead dead slow. I went down and got my overcoat and a pipe. The Second was putting on his clothes. 'Ah, you

may as well,' I said. 'It's thick all right.' I like a man that don't have to be called.

"All night we crawled along. You see, the Straits of Dover are very like Piccadilly Circus. You never know who you may run against in a fog, it's so crowded and the company is so mixed. About breakfast time the Old Man judged by soundings he was abeam of Dungeness and we went half-speed. The fog lifted about Beachy Head.

"So you see, the fact and the fiction was so mixed up in my mind that by the time we got into the Western Ocean I didn't feel sure which was which. The Second Mate never said a word more about green lights, for if he allowed there was an aeroplane about on the middle watch the Skipper would naturally ask him why he didn't see it. And then what mixed things in my mind still more was my picking up the Fourth's magazine in the mess-room one day and reading that yarn. I was going to tell you about this; but merely to show you how my brother impressed me that I dreamt about him at sea. But now—it seems I didn't dream it after all.

"I'm not surprised," went on Mr. Carville, after a slight pause to stir up the ash in his pipe with a pen-knife, "not surprised. My brother had it in him always. Quite apart from any personal feeling I might have for him or against, I was always prepared, so to say, to see him doing something big. His trouble with his season-ticket and his bigger trouble that put him in gaol were very much on a par. He always had an unconventional way of

getting what he wanted. It was no use talking to him; he simply doesn't see what you mean. I—I wonder what he's going to do next."

"He might pay a visit over here," I said tentatively. Mr. Carville gave me a quick glance.

"I shouldn't like that at all," he said, shaking his head. "You see . . . I might be away . . . I shouldn't like it at all."

He was obviously disturbed, and I felt that the suggestion had been unwise. Obviously it would not do to tell him that his brother knew where he was.

"So far," he remarked presently, "my little boys don't know anything about their uncle. I've no wish that they should. I want them to grow up in this country without any connection with Europe at all. Any debt they owe to Europe can be paid later. My brother couldn't help them at all. And Rosa——"

Mr. Carville stood up to go. The cover for *Payne's Monthly* caught his eye and he nodded approvingly.

"That's clever," he said. "I wish sometimes I'd gone in for doing things, like you. As you said, a man's mind rusts, gets seized, if it isn't working. I did think of doing something with a few papers I've got in my berth on the *Raritan*, but—I don't know."

"Why not let me have a look at them?" I said. "I might act as a sort of an agent for you, unpaid of course——"

"Much obliged," said Mr. Carville placidly, "but

I don't know as you need bother. I threw a book over the side once."

"A manuscript!" I said, aghast. He nodded, looking at his boots. "I thought a lot of it once; called it *Dreams on a Sea-Weed Bed*, and got a funny faced little girl in Nagasaki to type it for me. But one voyage, when I'd been reading a book called *New Grub Street*, I got sick of the whole thing and dumped it in the Java Sea, half way between Sourabaya and Singapore."

"I can't approve of that, Mr. Carville," I said, standing up and confronting him. "A foolish thing to do!"

"How's that? It might just as well be twenty fathoms deep in the Java Sea as twenty volumes deep in the British Museum? Eh! It was mine."

"Oh yes, yes; but it's hardly fair to deprive the world of it."

"Humph! I guess the world won't sweat, sir. It would be a good thing if a lot of modern stuff was dumped. Some of the authors too, by your leave!"

"I quite agree," I said. We had been to see Brieux' *Damaged Goods* in New York a week or so before, and we were in the mood to sympathize with Mr. Carville's doubt of modern tendencies. He stood by the door of the studio, one hand on the jamb, the other under his coat, the plain gold albert stretched across his broad person, the light shining on his smooth pink forehead as he looked down at his crossed legs. It has occurred to me from time to time that this unobtrusive man, with his

bizarre record and eccentric mentality, was evolving behind the mask of his mediocrity a new type. That this process was only half deliberate I am ready to believe. A man who disciplines his soul by flinging overboard the manuscript of a book does not thereby slay his imagination. He only drives it inward. When we first came to America we planted all our seeds in the garden too deep and they grew downward, assuming awful and grotesque forms. In some such way Mr. Carville's imagination was working within him, fashioning, as I say, a new type. I insist upon this, inasmuch as beyond it I have no mementoes of him. Both he and his are gone from our immediate observation, and though we may hear from him again, as a ship passing in the night, a rotund meditative figure pacing the deck of some outbound freighter, so far I remember him mainly by this intellectual inversion. For him the suppression of passion had become a passion; for him individuality was cloaked by the commonplace. In his way he made a contribution to art; he had hinted at the possibilities underlying a new combination of human characters. He had given strange hostages to Fortune, so that Fortune hardly knew what to do with them. It is possible that the abrupt and dramatic disappearance from his life (I refer to his brother) has slackened the intensity of his hold upon this idea; but I do not know.

He left us that evening quietly and without fuss. He had, in a notable degree, the neat movements

and economy of gesture which I can imagine indispensable to those who live in confined cabins and take their walks upon decks beneath which their shipmates sleep. In a quiet indescribable way there was manifest in his demeanour a gentle repudiation of all things traditionally English. You could not possibly imagine him vociferating "God save the King" or "Sons of the Sea." With a simple dignity he had assumed the dun livery of the alien, and there was to me a certain fineness in the sentiment that forbade any flaunting of his nationality in the faces of his native-born children.

And in the midst of our musings, just before we turned out the lights, it occurred to me quite suddenly that, since he had finished his story, it was quite possible that we should not see him again.

CHAPTER XII

THE VISION FROM THE KILLS *

FOR a long time that night I lay watching the gem-like glitter of the lights that fringed the eastern horizon. A strong north wind shook the house, sweeping the clouds before it with a contemptuous energy that had in it a promise of frost on the morrow. As the stars rose it was as though the lights of the city themselves were rising into the clear sky, emblems of the vast and serene power that had sent them forth. High above the level constellations soared the two great beacons of the Metropolitan and Woolworth towers, like the mast-head lights of some enormous vessel, while away northward, almost hidden by the swinging limbs of our elm, the occulting flash on the Times Building added a disquieting element to the otherwise peaceful scene. For me at least the glamour, the mystery and the beauty of that amazing city had never worn thin. For me, after a day in her roaring streets, after a scramble in her lotteries, there ever comes a recrudescence of that wonder with which I beheld my first view of her from the Jersey shore. The cynical American says, I know not with what truth, that the alien, clutching his bundle and gazing with anxious, frightened eyes toward the mountainous masonry

* The word "Kill" is Dutch in origin and signifies very much the same as Kyle (Scot), meaning *a deep arm of the sea*.

of Manhattan, catching sight of the green sun-lit image of Liberty with her benign unfaltering regard, holds his breath and feels within his bosom a fierce but short-lived ecstasy of joy. For one brief instant (I still quote the cynical American) faith and hope flame in his heart and the future lies before him as a shining pathway of industry and peace.

For me, however, the impression that New York had made was neither so unpractical nor so evanescent. For me there was reserved a certain *fear* of those multitudes and those heaven-kissing towers, an apprehension that even a species of victory after defeat had not sufficed to dethrone. Call it perhaps awe, mingled with homage to the indomitable spirit of the race, rather than fear.

This I felt, and every visit to the heart of the city quickened it, stirring my imagination to some fresh effort, and revealing some new phase of the exhaustless energy of America.

It was only natural that in the course of my musings it should strike me as strange that Mr. Carville displayed no shadow either of reverence or dislike for a place which impressed itself upon me more even than San Francisco or Chicago. It seemed to me strange that a man so sensitive to detail, so conscious of the scant poetry of the commonplace, should have no feeling for that astonishing accident which we call New York City. That he was not aware of her I refused absolutely to credit. If he could feel the beauty of Genoa and the immensity of London, he must necessarily be

conscious of the sublimity of Manhattan. I regretted that I had not led him to speak of this. I regretted the possibility of seeing him no more. I felt a pertinacious curiosity about him, as a man who could contemplate with equanimity a spectacle that for me held always an inscrutable problem. To the disgust of the cynical American I always waved aside Washington and even Boston, ignored even that mysterious bourne, the "Middle West," and claimed that he who found the secret of New York had also found the secret of America. As I drowsed that night I registered a vague resolve to see Mr. Carville again and broach the subject to him. I felt sure that in some way or other he would add something to my knowledge, not only of the city, but of himself.

I became aware of Mac's voice in my ear, and struggling to rise, saw that he held in his hand a letter bearing a special-delivery stamp. It is one of the terrors, and no doubt advantages of the American mail, that a letter may descend upon one at unexpected hours. You may be locking up for the night, or enjoying your beauty sleep in the early morn, when a breathless messenger will hammer at your door with a letter, quite possibly containing a bill. Such a missive my friend held over me like a Damocles sword, between thumb and finger, and awaited the news with interest.

It did not, however, contain a bill. It was a request from an advertising agency to proceed to Pleasant Plains, S. I., and interview the president

of a realty company who desired what we call tersely enough a "write-up," an essentially modern development of English Literature, in my opinion. Mac maintains with stubborn ingenuity that Doctor Johnson and Goldsmith did "write-ups," just as Shakespeare wrote melodramas, and Turner did "bird's-eye views." I make no such claim. The point is that a write-up brings in fifty dollars, while sonnets are a drug in the market. For this reason I sprang out of bed with unusual alacrity and prepared to catch the eight o'clock express.

"It may mean a 'bird's-eye,'" I remarked, as I bolted my breakfast.

"You can make the suggestion," returned Mac, passing me half a grape fruit. "There's no need to introduce either mosquitoes or ice-floes into a 'bird's-eye.'" This in reference to New Yorkers' objections to Staten Island.

"I shan't mention them in the booklet unless they specially ask me to," I said with a grin. We are always facetious when a new job comes up. I should not be surprised if the immortals were much the same.

Catching the eight o'clock express is with us rather a legend than a solid fact, in spite of our vaunted breakfast at half after seven. One has to shave, collect the necessary papers, put on one's boots, pocket tobacco and matches, run upstairs for a fresh handkerchief, things that somehow or other take time. As a rule we find ourselves half-way to the station, running breathlessly, only to find that we have two left-hand gloves, or that

some vitally important document has been left behind. The seasoned commuter, by long and arduous practice, eliminates these errors; but we, who go to New York but once in a week or so, are unskilled in early morning hustles, and generally see the tail-end of the express disappearing in the cutting. This morning, however, I managed to get out of the house by three minutes to eight, sufficient time for an athlete to do the half-mile to the station. With a silent prayer that the train might be a few minutes overdue I raced across the lot and down Pine Street.

I saw, as I hurried down the straight incline of Walnut Avenue, that I was in time, and slackened my pace to a walk. The morning, as I had expected, was clear and cold; a sharp frost had glazed the puddles in the roadway, and on the uplands of the further bank of the Pasayack River light patches of snow lay among the trees. The sun shone gloriously in a blue sky, and a keen wind blew the leaves into swirling eddies about the stoops of the houses. At the bottom of the hill was the station, a small low-roofed structure of wood. Some score of commuters were clustered about it, and I perceived, seated sedately upon a hand-truck, his feet crossed, his corn-cob drawing serenely, and his brown-gloved hands holding a copy of the *New York Daily News*, none other than Mr. Carville.

He raised his hand in salute as I came up. I hurried into the office to buy a ticket, and the train came in as I came out, the locomotive-bell

clanging faintly above the gasp of the air-brakes and the blowing of steam.

"Good morning," I said. "You are away early."

We climbed into the smoker and took a seat not likely to incommode the card-players.

"Ah," said he, smiling, "I expect we'll be going out to-night, you see, and it wouldn't do for the Chief to miss his passage, would it?"

"So soon!" I said, in some surprise.

Mr. Carville gave me one of his quick, good-tempered glances.

"Soon?" he echoed. "Do you know, sir, how long it takes to load the *Raritan*? Just eight hours. Humph!"

Mr. Carville was fond of using this ejaculation of his in a double sense, if I may say so. As he spoke his eyes were fixed with some interest upon four of our neighbours, who had seated themselves near us and had laid a grey mill-board card-table across their knees. Whether it was the card-table, or the extraordinary speed with which the *Raritan* was loaded, that excited his amusement, I am unable to decide. I was too familiar with the American habit of gambling in trains to take much notice of it. It is possible that Mr. Carville was less sophisticated.

"That," I said, "does not give you much time on shore."

"No," he said, "it doesn't. Speaking in a general way, we're glad to get to sea. In port, at this end at any rate, it's one continual rush. Shore people have very little consideration for sea-going

men. They come and bang at your door any time, day or night. You may be changing your shift—don't matter, in they come. Some business or other. At sea," he concluded, "we do have a little peace."

"Where are you bound for?" I asked, opening my paper.

"Oh, Savona or some Riviera port, I expect. They don't give us our orders till we're off Sandy Hook. You're going to New York, I suppose, sir, on business?"

"Not exactly. I'm going to Staten Island," I replied, "and I believe this is the quickest way."

He regarded me with astonishment.

"Is that so? I suppose you'll be taking the ferry to St. George, then?"

I said that such was my intention, and asked why.

"Why, you see, I'm going that way myself, to Communipaw. The *Raritan* is lying down there."

"Dear me! It never struck me——" I began. He laughed quietly.

"No," he said, "I don't suppose, if you asked a thousand New Yorkers where such and such a ship was loaded, that more than one could tell you. They know the *Lusitania* lies somewhere about Eighteenth Street and the *Oceanic's* next to her, and that's about all. It's the same everywhere. Ask a man in the Strand how to get to Tidal Basin; he won't know what Tidal Basin is, let alone *where* it is. As for an oil-boat—Humph!"

"I shall have your company, then?" I said. He shrugged his shoulders.

"If you don't object, sir," he said.

"I should like it above all things," I returned. "I was thinking last night that there were many things I should like to ask you, but I was afraid that possibly you might not visit us again for a long time."

"Not at all," he said. "I was very glad to step in. You've got an atmosphere . . . if I can call it that. I mean there's something I don't get on a ship, or for that matter, at home . . . you understand? Now and again I feel I'd like to talk to people who *do* understand."

"That reminds me," I said, "that I have been wondering how New York impresses you. I think it is rather wonderful myself."

Mr. Carville smoked silently for a few moments while the card-players pursued their games and the train thundered through the flat swamps of Riverside.

"Have you ever seen it," he asked, "from the Narrows?"

I shook my head. The *Campania* had come up in a dank fog, when I had arrived seven years before. I mentioned the customs formalities that keep one below at such a time. Mr. Carville smiled gently.

"I always think," he said, "that for an artist, that view is the best, because it's the first. I was looking at that picture in your friend's studio last night; that one of New York from Brooklyn, and I couldn't help noticing how heavy he'd made it. See what I mean? He was too close. The

weight of the buildings gets on one's mind. That's the trouble with Americans, anyway. They show you a building and tell you the weight of it, and then the cost of it. Even women are judged by their weight. Only last night I saw in the papers something about a suffragette. They said she weighed one hundred and fifty pounds! I think it is a mistake, myself. Tonnage is all right in a ship; but it doesn't signify much, either in a city or a woman."

Rather astonished, I agreed that this was sound æsthetic doctrine.

"Now," went on Mr. Carville, "if you ask me how New York impresses me, I should say that it reminds me of Venice."

The train stopped at Newark. For an instant I was quite unable to determine whether Mr. Carville was joking or not. One look at his face, however, precluded any such surmise. I waited until the doors banged and the train was moving before I said, "In what way, Mr. Carville?"

"Mind you, it may not impress you in any way like Venice——"

"I regret never to have been there," I interrupted.

"You may," he assented. "You may. A man can do easy enough without ever seeing Naples; but Venice——ah!"

"Yes, I can imagine that," I said, "but in what way——?"

"Well, I'll show you, as you're going to St. George—*San Giorgio* as you might say—he chuckled—"and you can tell me what you think."

I fell into a study at this, a study that lasted until the train slid slowly into Jersey City and we joined the throng that were hurrying towards Chambers Street Ferry. I decided to let the matter stand over for the moment. It would not do to act illiberally towards a man who combined a knowledge of sea-faring with Italian literature, and who had evidently arrived, however unacademically, at certain original judgments and criteria of life. I offered no remarks as the Erie ferry bore us swiftly across the glittering and congested Hudson to Chambers Street, and I observed that Mr. Carville was absorbed in watching how the vessel was piloted among the traffic. It was natural that his imagination should be stirred by a familiar skill. As we crossed the bows of an incoming liner I saw his eyes sweep over her, keen, critical, appraising. No doubt he saw many things that escaped my landward vision. For me ships are very much alike. I expect he realized this and forbore to bewilder me with matters of technical interest. I have a sneaking appreciation of the mystery and beauty of a ship in full sail on the open sea, an appreciation I scarcely cared to reveal to an engineer. He stood by my side on the upper deck, his corn-cob in his hand, imperturbably observant, a miracle of detached respectability. And he thought New York like Venice!

Nor did we talk very much as we walked quickly down West Street to the Battery. Once he looked at his watch and remarked that he wanted "to be aboard by ten." The sun shone on the water

dazzlingly as we rounded the end of Manhattan, showing the hull of the Ellis Island ferry a black mass. The usual crowd of foreigners with their dark eyes and Slavic features, shoe-shine boys, touts and officials waited around the entrance. I put my hand on Mr. Carville's arm.

"Our steamer isn't in yet," I said. "Suppose we see them land."

He glanced up and nodded, and we paused.

As the ferry came alongside the crowd gradually drew together more closely, and some, who had been sitting in dejection on the seats, rose and joined us. A tall policeman walked to and fro, keeping us back, bending his head to listen to a woman with a baby. Young men in flashy button-boots and extravagantly-cut clothes chuckled among themselves, while two serious-looking men talked German, an endless argument. Above us the Stars and Stripes fluttered and snapped in the breeze, and the trains on the Elevated Road crawled carefully round the curve. Now and again the deep bellow of a steamer's whistle smote on our ears, smears of sound on the persistent roar of the city behind us. The feet of the little crowd shuffled as they shifted to get a better view, and two boys, chewing gum, climbed on the seats and stood up. A small girl of ten or so sped past on roller-skates, uttering shrill cries to a companion beyond the grass-plot. And then the gates opened and they came out to us, a little flock of frightened animals, each with his ticket pinned on his breast, each looking round for an instant as sheep do when let

out of a pen, instantly herded by officials in peaked caps. A big, unshaved man in a black sheepskin cap opened his arms and the woman with the baby hurried to him. A smart girl behind us pushed through and went up to a sullen-looking old man with a Derby hat and a high-arched nose. The boys on the seat exchanged ribaldry that drew the eyes of the tall policeman to them, and they vanished. The little crowd of aliens began to move towards the East Side and we followed as far as the Staten Island Ferry. I turned to Mr. Carville, thinking he might have some comment to make. He shrugged his shoulders and drew out his little brass tobacco-box.

"Humph!" he said. "They've got it all to come," and began to pare the tobacco into his hand. I could detect no sympathy in his tone, only a grim humour and contempt for the credulity of those trembling peasants now hurrying to their doom. And as I thought of this, quite suddenly he began to talk of his brother.

"I've often wondered what Frank would have made of all this," he said, waving his hand towards the sweep of the Brooklyn Bridge. "Not that I'd like him to come near me and mine, but just out of curiosity, I've wondered."

"I should say he would be likely to get on well," I said.

"You're right—he would! He would take hold right away and as they say here get away with it. He's a citizen of the world, is Frank. He'd be on Fifth Avenue or in Sing Sing within a twelvemonth.

But there's no need for him to come to America. He's fallen on his feet again apparently in London. I hope he stops there."

"You seem to have some secret fear of your brother, Mr. Carville——" I began.

"Secret? There's nothing secret about it, sir. I'm scared of him. You don't know him, so you can't understand how you'd feel about it. I tell you the mere presence of that chap in the room unsettles people. He's a disturbing influence. Even strangers notice it. Suppose he was over here, and me away in the Mediterranean? You've no idea how he can talk and wheedle and explain everything to suit his own ends. I do."

I did not say so, but I understood Mr. Carville's feelings. Cecil's letters bore him out very completely.

"There's another thing you may not appreciate. When you're married you will, no doubt. A man and his wife aren't always on the same dead level terms with each other. Little differences, lasting perhaps an hour or a minute, sometimes till breakfast, crop up. Even in a case like mine, here to-day and gone to-morrow, we can get on each other's nerves. There's friction in every machine . . . unavoidable. You understand me, sir?"

"Yes," I said. "As well as a bachelor can, I think I appreciate your point. You mean that since you can't foresee these minor affairs and since you may leave home before the clouds roll by . . ."

"That's just it! Imagine a man like Frank liv-

ing next door say, a man who has known Rosa, as I told you . . . See?"

As we stepped upon the ferry I noticed that his features were sharp and bore the impress of a quite unusual secret care. I felt guiltily that we had been unwise to tell so much to the painter-cousin. Who could tell what it might not lead to, even after so long an interval, with so incalculable a man as this brother?

With the bellow of the whistle Mr. Carville's face cleared and assumed its wonted placidity. The deck trembled as the screw began to revolve, and imperceptibly we moved out towards Governor's Island. It was just here, I think, as we began our little six-mile journey to St. George, that a sudden illumination came to me. I understood Mr. Carville's reason for waiting instead of explaining his impression of New York. He gave me credit, apparently, for the ability to find it out for myself.

The vessel was going swiftly now over the shining waters of New York Bay. To the left lay the low and sombre buildings of Governor's Island; to the right the prison-like pile of Ellis Island showed red in the sunlight. On either side the shores fell away from us, leaving Bartholdi's statue, for a brief moment, the dominant note in the scene. Quickly we hurried by, and Black Tom, with his fringe of cranes and stacks, his dark panoply of low-lying smoke, was revealed. Before us uprose the wooded heights of Staten Island, and far down the Narrows a glimpse of the blue Atlantic. A

couple of tramp steamers, one with much red paint on her bows, were coming up past us, and I noticed the Red Ensign was flying from the poop. With large gestures Mr. Carville's arm swept the horizon, indicating the salient points. Almost before I was aware of it we were entering the ferry station and he was calling my attention to the chimneys and buildings on the Communipaw shore.

"Now," said he, as we emerged upon the street, "your road lies down the coast, but if you have an hour to spare, you might come over and look at the ship. We'll take the trolley to New Brighton and ferry across from there. But of course——"

"With pleasure," I said hastily. It occurred to me that I could do worse than visit Mr. Carville's ship. We boarded a trolley-car.

"You see," said Mr. Carville, "I'm interested in Staten Island. In a way it's very English. About a year ago I bought a lot up at Richmond Bridge. The house will be ready in the spring and we'll move in. I've had a fancy for a long while to have a home of my own. We did think of buying in your part, but it's rather a long way for me, besides being dear."

"You'll be leaving Van Diemen's Avenue?" I said. He nodded.

"Sure. The wife's not very anxious to stay out there. She's funny in some ways. Thinks there's a prejudice against her."

"I assure you——" I began.

"Oh, I don't mean you, sir. She means in the stores. She's heard things . . . Women are quick

to take offence. She has her own way of living and it's a good way. We shouldn't like to feel we weren't wanted. And you know, in your parts, there's a good deal of gentility creeping in. I was reading the local paper last night . . . Mrs. This and Mrs. That entertaining to bridge, and so on! Humph!"

The car jingled and swayed round the corners, keeping close to the shore, and pulled up with a jerk at New Brighton. Across the narrow belt of water I could see the sterns of many ships.

"Here we are," said Mr. Carville. "The launch starts down there."

A stiff breeze was blowing and we were occupied with our hats until we reached the Communipaw side. Mr. Carville muttered a warning about no smoking ". . . five hundred dollars fine . . . necessary, you see," and I saw his corn-cob no more until we reached his room.

"There she is," he remarked, indicating two very red funnels projecting above a roof. "That's the *Raritan*."

A faint smell of petroleum was in the air as we threaded our way among the blue-ended barrels and lengths of oily hose. In one way this ship of Mr. Carville's was novel to me. There was about her decks no noise of cranes lifting cargo, no open hatchways, no whiffs of steam or screaming of pulley-blocks, with huge bales of merchandise swinging in mid-air. As we ascended the accommodation ladder I saw nothing save a young man with thick gauntlets standing guard over an iron

wheel valve in a big pipe that ran along the deck. A stout, iron-grey man in uniform was leaning against the sky-light on the poop-deck as we came past the funnels. With a slight bashfulness Mr. Carville turned, and making a vague introductory gesture, pronounced our names. I caught the words "Chief Officer" and "come to have a look round!" There was a little further parley, in which the "Old Man," "stores," and "The Second" bore some part. I did not pay much attention to the conversation, to tell the truth. I was looking northward across New York Bay and comprehending the significance of Mr. Carville's parallel between Manhattan and the City of the Lagoons. For a moment I forgot that I was standing on the deck of a ship. From my lacustrine vantage the whole of the wide harbour lay in view, the more distant edge of Long Island forming an irregular and dusky line betwixt the blue waters and the bluer sky. In the middle distance stood the statue of Liberty, islanded in the incoming tide-way, while away beyond, rising in superb splendour from a pearly haze, the innumerable towers of Manhattan floated and gleamed before my eyes. Irresistibly there came to me a memory of Turner's Venetian masterpieces, and I knew that even that great magician would have seized upon the scene before me with avidity, would have delighted in the fairy-like threads of the bridges, the poetic groupings of the vast buildings, and the innumerable fenestrations of the *campanili*. One by one half-forgotten fragments of Byron came back to me

as I looked out across the wide lagoon. I thought of Venice "throned on her hundred Isles," of him who said,

"I loved her from my boyhood; she to me
Was as a fairy city of the heart,
Rising like water-columns from the sea,
Of joy the sojourn and of wealth the mart."

One by one, moreover, there came before me still more convincing evidence that this casual analogy had in it a deeper significance, that here the Queen of the Adriatic was indeed resuscitated and the Venetian Republic born to a sublimer destiny. Surely the same indomitable spirit, the same high courage, that had reared that wondrous city out of the sea, was here before me, piling story upon story, pinnacle beyond pinnacle, till our old-world hearts sickened and our unaccustomed brains grew dizzy at the sight.

For a time—I know not how long—I stood with my hand on the rail, looking out upon that vision from the Kills. I heard Mr. Carville's voice behind me, and I turned.

"What do you think, sir?" he said, and waved his hand.

"You are right," I replied in a low tone. "You are certainly right. As for your *San Giorgio*," I smiled, "I'm afraid, Mr. Carville, you are a cleverer man than I thought you!"

"Come down and have a smoke," he said. "I've some letters to see to."

We descended the companion-way and crossed a

large cabin with berths all round. Mr. Carville selected a Yale key from his bunch and opened his door. A young man in a soiled serge suit came out of the next room with some letters.

"Ah!" said Mr. Carville, hanging up his Derby hat. "How's things, mister?" and he took the letters.

The young man addressed as mister made several incoherent remarks of a technical nature, and with a glance in my direction withdrew.

"Sit down," said Mr. Carville, shutting the door. "You'll excuse me for a minute?"

I sat down on a red plush settee while my host settled into a wicker easy chair by a small desk. The room by our computation would be small, yet I perceived that Mr. Carville had within reach of his hand almost every convenience of civilization. At his elbow were a telephone and a speaking tube; just above him an electric fan. Electric lights were placed all over the room. His bed lay below the port-holes and a wash-basin of polished mahogany was folded up beside the bed. On the table were cigars and whisky. And between the bed and the wardrobe, on four shelves, were ranged some two hundred volumes; even for a landsman a respectable library.

He sat for some moments reading his letters with patient attention, pinching his lower lip between thumb and finger. My estimate of him had undergone several changes since leaving the Battery; since leaving deck, even. I felt somehow that this quiet, sedate person was no longer apologetic in his

attitude towards me. Here he was master, and a subtle alteration of his demeanour indicated this to me. He sat there, as I watched him, solid and secure by inalienable right of succession, a son of that stern, imaginative adventurer, his father; a son, moreover, of that sea which he served from year to year. I looked up at the photograph of his wife which he had mentioned, a photograph set in silver. The soft shadows of the platinotype suited Mrs. Carville. Evidently this had been taken about the time of her marriage; the fine modelling of her face and the poise of her head were instinct with youth. In her eyes I fancied something of the mild expression with which she accompanied her remark, "He is a good man." On either side of the silver frame were small pictures of the boys.

Mr. Carville put the two letters in a wire clip and offered me a cigar.

"Now you can see for yourself," said he, "where I live." He laughed. "I'm one of the few people who haven't got a bad word to say of the Standard Oil Co. They give me more cubic feet of private space, bigger cabin space, and better food than any shipowner across the water. They give me any mortal thing for my engines except time to overhaul them. The newspapers tell me they're a blood-sucking trust battenning on the body-politic, and so on. Personally . . ." and Mr. Carville drew the stopper from a square bottle, "personally, I find them very decent people to work for."

I sat looking at him for some time as he busied

himself with a drawer which contained, he assured me, an apollinaris. It struck me that though he had gained in certain external trappings of the mind since entering his room, he had ceased to appear to me as a heroic figure. Even the perception which had appreciated the grandeur of New York, the wit which had connected St. George with *San Giorgio Maggiore*, seemed to me incongruous with the present phase of his character. Quite possibly I had been so drilled in hatred of Standard Oil that I unconsciously revolted from the notion that any good could come out of that protean enterprise! And yet, when I reflected, I could not but wonder whether, after all, he, in his quiet efficiency, his sober sense, and his deliberate renunciation of the glory of romance, was not as logical a product of our modern age as the corporation he served.

"You serve both God and Mammon," I remarked as the soda-water splashed into the glass. He nodded, smiling.

"Yes," he said, "or rather let us call it rendering unto Cæsar. After all, something must bend if you are going to make ends meet. Cæsar," he added, lifting up his glass, "isn't such a bad proposition when you have a family to provide for."

I agreed that this was so and scanned the books on the shelves. They at least were a noble company, their gold and green and blue broken by the plain yellow paper backs of Italian books. Shakespeare was there and St. Francis of Assisi; *Fors Clavigera* in a cabinet edition; Symonds' *Renaiss-*

sance and Pater in wide-margined dignity. Tucked in corners, too, were books in that quaint pocket edition of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*: *Rabelais*, in five volumes, Beaumarchais' *Memoirs*, Rousseau, Scarron's *Travesty of Virgil* and that extraordinary work of genius, *The Maxims of La Rochefoucauld*. As I turned them over I saw on their pages the purple rubber-stamps of some bookseller in Tunis, Bizerta, Tangier, and other places even more obscure. I had a vision of the man making his way, in some perspiration, through the press of Arabs and Moors to the little shop under the arches. I saw him scanning the shelves, the Derby hat pushed back, the vest open, the thumb and finger pinching the lower lip. . . . I turned to him with a worn copy of *Heine* in my hand.

"I think," I said, "I must fit out an expedition, to go and dredge the Java Sea for that manuscript you threw overboard."

"No," he replied, settling in his chair. "It wouldn't be worth it."

"We don't often find a man who could do it," I said.

"That's because they lack balance. The mistake artists and literary people make is, they think that because a thing is priceless, we can't do without it. I think it's a mistake. Someone pays half-a-million dollars for a Turner, say. Well, even if it was burnt up, lost overboard, what of it? It can be done again."

"Do you think so?" I asked. I was glad Mac did not hear this.

"Certainly!" replied Mr. Carville. "Everything's been done, which is a sound argument for supposing it can be done again. There's plenty of men doing much better than they did in olden times. I can't see much sense in the theory that because a picture is old it's a masterpiece, and because it's new it's junk. We ought to take longer views. How do *we* know what the youngsters are going to do?"

"That indeed is on the knees of the gods," I said as I put the *Heine* back on the shelf. I looked at my watch.

"I must be off to Pleasant Plains," I said. "If you are not going out at once, I should like to return in the afternoon; but I must run now."

"I expect we'll be bunkered and out by tea-time," he said, rising. "Still, some other time. . . . We're not away very long, month or so . . ."

He followed me to the gangway and I bade him farewell and *bon-voyage*. He had donned a double-breasted coat with brass buttons and a cap with a badge and gold cord on it. The effect on my mind was somewhat disquieting. He seemed to have vanished behind an official mask, a mask whose sympathy with and knowledge of me was inexpressibly remote. I looked back as I crossed over towards the ferry, and saw him in deep conversation with the Chief Officer.

It was between four and five when I boarded the Staten Island ferry once more. The wind had gone down with the sun, whose red globe flung long bars of ruddy gold athwart the still

water. I took my stand on the upper deck. Once again I looked across the bay and beheld that wonderful vision of New York floating above a blue haze, a mass of glittering pinnacles and rose-pink walls flaunting snowy pennants of white vapour, and looped to the sombre vagueness of Brooklyn by the long catenary curves of the suspension bridges. As the steamer started I walked aft, that I might not see the dissolution of the phantasy. It may be a weakness; but there is to me, mingled with all perception of beauty, a feeling akin to pain. Often I have envied those more robust souls who can gaze with unfaltering eyes at the beauty of this world, and feel no pang. I am not so. I was absorbed in this thought when I saw a steamer with two red funnels coming round from the Kills. At the masthead blew a flag with a blue eagle. As she came across our track I saw that she was the *Raritan*. On the poop-deck was a familiar figure, short, rotund and blue. I stepped to the end of the deck and waved my hand. Mr. Carville was walking back and forth, hands in pockets, his corn-cob pipe in his mouth. He paused and caught my signal, answering heartily. As the distance between us increased he resumed his promenade, and the *Raritan*, threading the Narrows, dwindled to a dark blot surmounted by a patch of vivid red. Once again I turned northwards, and the swift dusk of evening was falling. The sun had dropped behind the Jersey hills, and uprising behind Manhattan was a grey mist and a steely sky, ominous of snow.

As I walked up Pine Street to Van Diemen's Avenue the air was opaque and silent, while the thick, soft flakes that touched my face like chill fingers clung to my coat and balled under my feet. Winter, as we know it not in England, was come at last.

CHAPTER XIII

MISCELLANY

IT has struck me often enough of late that, for an artistic and literary colony, ours is not very acute. For it is a sad and undeniable fact that, now the Carvilles are gone away to live on Staten Island, they seem to have ceased to exist as far as Netley is concerned. We alone seem to have attained to some small knowledge of Mr. Carville's peculiar record and essentially individual philosophy. We alone know the relationship with the celebrated and unfortunate Icarus who achieved international fame by crossing the Atlantic, only to crash to earth, as so often happens, in a comparatively trivial enterprise. Mr. Carville and his family never became the talk of the country club. They roused no interest at the soda-counter of Pakenham's drug-store or in the room behind the bar of Slovitzsky's Hotel on Chestnut Street. Our literary club makes no mention in its List of Authors who have lived in Netley, of Mr. Carville and his *Cameos of the Sea*. Happy the nations who have no history, they say, and no doubt the aphorism may be applied to families as well. Certainly, if Mr. Carville proposed, as no doubt he did, that his family should attain to felicity by a profound obscurity, he has attained his desire. It is left for Time to show whether Benvenuto Cellini and Giuseppe Mazzini, when they grow up, will emerge from that obscurity

and astonish the world with some novel manifestations of the family genius.

But this is to anticipate. The immediate point is that none of our neighbours—not even our own friends, like Williams nor Eckhardt, nor Wederslen nor Confield, which last has a sort of vested interest in Europe which is attested by his much-travelled bag—had any inkling of the story to which they saw us listening as they passed our porch on certain afternoons that fall. How little does Mrs. Wederslen think, for example, that her surmise about the burnt aeroplane was grotesquely wrong! How little does Williams, when he brings us his water-colours, done in that fall-vacation at Bar Harbor, appreciate at its real value our etching of an aeroplane lying across an English hedgerow! Even Miss Fraenkel, I think, has no clear knowledge of Mrs. Carville's part in the tragedy of that New Year's Night. I remarked early in this narrative that Miss Fraenkel's importance in it was of the slightest. Her charming enthusiasm was ever an *ignis fatuus* leading her into unprofitable bye-ways of conjecture. We have, therefore, the superior position as regards the vanished family who lived next door. We know, as I have said, where they are gone; but we do not tell. It gives us a certain rare aesthetic pleasure to keep our own counsel.

And I think I may say we are qualified, after New Year's Day, to keep any secret, for we kept it from the Metropolitan Press when they invaded us, a dozen strong, to "take our statements." We laugh over it now, that sudden descent of New

York "leg-men," breezy, businesslike, well-dressed young gentlemen of the "clean-cut" type; but we were glad enough when they were through asking for facts and photographs and impressions, and had gone, leaving the porch rather mussed-up and the snow in front as though a herd of buffaloes had trampled it. But even this is to anticipate a little.

I have mentioned, somewhere, that our devotion to the purer and less remunerative branches of our respective arts led us occasionally to take a holiday. With a subconscious deference to the advice of our local doctor, that "sedentary folks should sell their automobiles and take long walks," our day's vacation sometimes took us into the country. We had no automobile to sell, unfortunately; but otherwise we carried out the venerable gentleman's instructions by starting early and returning home late in a condition approaching collapse. We thus came to know certain tracts of Passaic and Bergen Counties in a manner quite impossible to the motorist. We struck off roads and took to the wooded hills of the Deer Foot Range. We spent forenoons losing ourselves and then, having eaten our sandwiches and drained our flasks, would pass the rest of the day trying for a predetermined point, but generally emerging into some unknown and delightfully unsuspected valleys of quietness; Sleepy Hollows down which no headless horsemen had ever thundered to startle the wild-fowl sailing low in the evening twilight, and over which the moon would later pour her serene, unearthly radiance; while we, footsore, hungry, thirsty, and quite absurdly elated at our

success, would press on towards some twinkle of light in the distance, which told us of refreshment, and possibly a welcome railroad journey home.

It was only natural that, on those rambles which we took after Mr. Carville had begun his story and while he himself was rambling more extensively about the Western Ocean, my friend and I would discuss him and the highly stimulating outlook upon life which his original mind working in a novel medium had engendered. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that he monopolized our interest to the exclusion of Art. Or rather he, as a living and concrete example, became a kind of test, to which we brought a great deal we had thought and seen and read. To me he became significant of even more, for he contravened, in his own life and philosophy, so much that is generally taken for granted in fiction, that I grew doubtful both of him and the conventions he flouted. It had been obvious to me for some years that any advance in imaginative work seemed impossible inasmuch as the most advanced men had found nothing ahead but a stone wall, against which they advanced in vain. The theory that there was a hole in this wall somewhere, through which we could get into a freer air and less trammelled conditions, was attractive enough. We were all looking for this hole, but somehow it had eluded us. I, in my humble way, had groped and analyzed and plotted to find it, but without success, when suddenly it seemed to me I heard a voice from the other side, Mr. Carville's voice, telling us not only what the world looked like out there, but

also how he got there. This is no doubt a fanciful picture; but one of Mr. Carville's salient points was the way he, the least fanciful of men, appealed to the fancy of others and painted pictures without the use of violent colours and futile superlatives. And the impersonal note which he maintained did really give to his story the effect of a voice coming over a wall.

So I looked at the matter, and so I explained it on our long walks through Pompton and on to Greenwood Lake. But my friend, though he accepted much of my theorizing as interesting, was struck most powerfully by Mr. Carville's strange attitude towards his native land. It was all very well, Mac urged, to get through a hole in the wall and show the way to freedom from conventions in art, though (to his mind) conventions were all right if you found the market—but to say that England was “on the crumble” was silly. And to harp on gentility . . . Mac shook his head.

“But that is one of the stones he had to remove to make his hole in the wall,” I argued.

“Then your wonderful hole in the wall is only our old friend the Door of Unconventionality,” he retorted.

“By no means. He's the most conventional chap we have met since we left the Chelsea Arts Club. What singles him out from so many others is that he saw where he fitted. And it so happened that he fitted somewhere below that to which he would supposedly climb. Consider! Most of us never attain to the position to which we imagine it has

pleased God to call us. We are perpetually struggling to succeed. We 'get on in the world,' it is true, but only comparatively. To hear some of us talk, you'd think the world itself wasn't made sufficiently large and well-furnished to supply us with the position we are designed to fill. But Mr. Carville looks, not higher, but lower. He espies the particular niche which suits him perfectly, and he calmly descends a few rungs of the ladder and steps off into oblivion. Not the niche, mind you, that the world might estimate as his, and which would procure for him the guerdon of wealth and fame and posthumous biographies; but the niche which he conceives to contain for him all that he, according to some highly original conception of ultimate justice, deserves. As for England being 'on the crumble,' I consider it a conservative description of what has been going on in that country for years. In most departments of life England has crumbled, literally crumbled away. What Mr. Carville omits is the emergence of the new England, an England he doesn't like, an England we shall probably find hard to assimilate and which may quite conceivably drive us to do what Mr. Carville has sagely done already—come back here and stop for good!"

So we talked! At least, I talked and my friend concurred, or demurred, or very often digested my wisdom in silence—the silence that, betwixt friends, means as much or even more than speech. And I remember, one still evening, the patches of dry snow lying on the grass of the side-walk and the

lawns, as we came wearily up Van Diemen's Avenue after a tramp to Echo Lake, there had been a long silence after I had been theorizing on the subject of Mrs. Carville. I am always listened to indulgently on the subject of women! It is tacitly taken for granted that my knowledge of the subject is exclusively theoretical. I do not contest this, because the converse of the proposition, that all married men are practical experts, is so absurd that nobody ventures to state it. I had been discussing Mrs. Carville and the probable effect of American life upon her when she should have more leisure to cultivate herself. My point was that she might possibly have some influence upon her husband. And this was followed, as I have said, by a long silence.

"No," said Mac, at length, "I don't think so." I had almost forgotten what we were talking about, for I could already see that the lamps in the dining-room were lighted and shadows moving on the blind.

"Oh!" I said. "Why not?"

"Well," he answered. "Of course, we don't know her very well, but we do know him. And I should say that the woman doesn't live who could shift him from what he proposed to do. You may not see it in the same way, but it is plain enough. His brother," went on my friend with a laugh, "hasn't all the devil in the family, and don't you think it."

And we came up to the door and sat down in the porch to take off our boots. I confess this view was to me entirely novel. I felt chagrined that I had

been so lacking in intelligence as to miss so obvious a possibility. I had a faint, uneasy suspicion that my friend was laughing at me. But the idea was so pregnant with interest that I soon forgot my mortification. Before I had got my boots completely off I was away on a tour of this new and fascinating region. I leaned back in my chair and gazed pensively towards the faint glare of New York City. It was true, I reflected, that we had at the very first postulated a certain friction between our neighbour and his wife. But then we had not listened to the love story of our neighbour and his wife. I thought, as I sat there, that I saw the point I had missed. Mr. Carville, supposing he had what my friend called the devil in the family, would not exploit it while telling us the story of his life. And so I, who had abandoned myself to the enjoyment of his peculiar mentality, had forgotten that he might have, all the time, some of the "devil" after all, that he might, in short, be difficult to live with. I hesitated to use the word "faults." Mr. Carville himself had seemed to imply that the ordinary matrimonial disagreements were as inevitable and as fundamental as cosmic disturbances. Perhaps they were. "Devil," however, was another matter.

"I wonder who's indoors," said Mac, getting up. Thus roused, I heard voices inside, with laughter from Bill. The next moment the door opened and Benvenuto Cellini and Giuseppe Mazzini were discovered behind it.

"What, visitors?" said Mac, touching the dim-

ples in their cheeks; and they nodded and looked at each other in a very taking way they had. Bill came in hastily. "They came in this afternoon," she explained, "and asked most solemnly if they might have some tea. Ma was gone to New York, they said, and she might be late."

"That so?" said Mac. "Well, we'll have 'em to dinner as well. What 'say, you chaps? Will you have dinner with us?"

Again they nodded and looked at each other, and Ben remarked gravely that they were hungry.

We went off to have a wash and a change.

They certainly were two pretty little men as they stood there in red jerseys and blue corduroy knickers. My friend's custom of snatching open the piano and heralding dinner with a furious tornado of chords pleased them vastly.

"What's that for?" Beppo inquired expectantly.

"Chop," said Mac, rumpling their hair. "Pipe all hands to the galley. Here comes the salt horse and the hard tack."

"Their father isn't a deck-swab," I remarked mildly.

"Perhaps not," he retorted, "but pipe all hands etcetera is in that comic opera I'm illustrating and doing the costumes for, and I've got it on the brain. Have you noticed," he went on, "that Carville seems to have no professional slang?"

"He's not typical of his class," I admitted. "Any more than his wife is of her's, I suppose. Moreover, he knows we know nothing of his work and explains it in simple language. Does it not occur to you,"

I inquired, "that his avoidance of slang and dialect and foreign words and profanity is part of the freedom of the other side of the wall? Think of what we have lived through in the last twenty years! We have listened to a tale of the ends of the earth and the teller of it neither foams at the mouth nor talks in a strange technical jargon nobody ever spoke and nobody can understand. Without naming any names, isn't it a relief? Isn't it refreshing? After the terrible experiences we have had in the past!"

"Did mother tell you to come in?" he asked the children after nodding to me.

"Yes," said Beppo, thrusting out his chin and working his neck slowly as Bill tied a napkin round it. And he went on in a thin, clear, little voice: "We ha'nt any help in our house, an' Ma she had to go to the stores, so we said we'd like comin' in here to see you till she comes back."

"Well, that's awfully nice of you, old chap. Next time you'll bring mother too, eh?"

They looked at each other at this, and then at their spoons as they leaned over the soup.

"Anyhow, you'll ask her, won't you?" coaxed Bill. "Say, how pleased we shall be if she comes in some evening."

They smiled, and Beppo said, "Sure, we'll ask her," and then we all laughed. I suppose we were a trifle fatuous about them and treated them more as delicious playthings than as human beings. They bore it very well, however, and after dinner, when my friend, in spite of his long tramp and a "job"

half done upstairs in the studio, played the piano, and did conjuring tricks with a handkerchief and a glass of water, and then got out a concertina which had often wakened the echoes of King's Road, Chelsea, in the small hours, they were in raptures. The concertina certainly impressed them as "a divine box of sounds." After "Church Bells in the Distance" they jumped and clapped their hands and said "Bully!" A new and appreciative audience is always stimulating to an artist. My friend surpassed himself. He told them about the London costers, how they had hundreds of pearl buttons and velvet collared coats and wide bell-mouthed trousers, how they played the concertina so beautifully that the policemen in the streets wept into their helmets and the King came out of his palace and danced a jig with the Lord Mayor outside the Mansion House. And he told them how it sometimes chanced the coster got drunk on his way home, and this made him play very pathetically indeed like this . . . and then the broken strains of "Two Lovely Black Eyes" came forth, but ended abruptly in a squeak. That, they were told, was his wife, Eliza, who had come out and slapped him. Eliza had joined the Salvation Army and sang only hymns. This was the prelude to "Where is My Wandering Boy To-night?" rendered in a way, Bill remarked *sotto voce*, calculated to keep him wandering. But Beppo and Ben sat on the edge of their chairs, entranced. It was evidently a novel evening for them. We put the concertina away and got a drawing-board with a sheet of paper and a stick

of charcoal, and everybody had to draw a pig blindfold. The usual fragmentary animals appeared, some so embryonic as to be unrecognizable by their designers, some with tails in their ears, others with too many legs. My own efforts were adjudged the best, which led Bill to express surprise that a man who couldn't draw anything at all with his eyes open should be able to draw a pig blindfold. Tired of this, Mac put on a pair of castanets and danced a Spanish fandango. He hung up a sheet in front of his studio lamp and performed an amazing series of shadow-pictures representing the "Hunting of the Snark." When our small visitors saw the Tub-Tub, "that terrible bird," flapping horribly about with his three-cornered eyes glaring at them, they grasped our hands and shouted with the most exquisite mingling of horror and delight. They were consoled with a wrestling match to which my versatile friend challenged himself. Having shaken hands with himself, he then grasped himself in the most approved catch-as-catch-can manner, struggled desperately to throw himself and finally triumphed by flinging himself in the air, turning a somersault and coming down on the carpet with a bump. Getting up and falling exhausted into a chair, he was greeted with loud cries to "do it again."

"No, indeed, you won't," said Bill emphatically. "You must be crazy to do it at all after walking I don't know how many miles. Children, do you want to kill my husband?"

They shook their heads solemnly. At that mo-

ment they evidently thought him quite the most wonderful person in the world. I often think so myself and I know his wife holds that view always. So I at once inaugurated a story-telling competition. I told them of an extraordinary affair that had once happened in England, where I was eking out a wretched existence as a hunter of buried treasure. I had received information about a tomato-can full of diamonds hidden in a beef-steak pie which would be served at a certain old inn on the shores of a lake far away towards the North Sea, and I was just packing up my patent can-opener, a box of candy and a packet of gum for refreshment on the way, and a pair of silver-mounted pistols like those in the studio upstairs, when an old woman with bright red hair tapped at the door . . . tap-tap! Ben and Beppo both looked at the door, and Bill said in a low voice, "Don't frighten them; you'll make them dream." But they were watching me once more with their round, expectant eyes, and I was racking my brains to discover the purport of the old woman with the bright red hair—for I am always inventing fascinating characters about which I know nothing!—when the brass Canterbury Pilgrim was lifted twice and we heard a real knock on a real door . . . tap-tap!

It was Mrs. Carville. She stepped quickly into the room so that the door might be closed on the cold night air, and looked round with an unwonted gaiety in her mien. As her gaze fell upon the two little boys, who stood close to my knee and hampered my rising, I fancied the expression of her

fine dark eyes hardened a little. It may have been only fancy, but it made me wonder if the cause of her elation lay beyond the family circle. At first I had a twinge, for when a woman, whose husband is in some Mediterranean port, is elated by something beyond her front door, the world (and I belonged to the world, after all) looks grave. I suppose I myself looked grave as I bowed, for she regarded me—her eyes coming back to my face for a moment—with a certain gallant challenge, as though she read my shadowy thought and defied it. And then, sitting back in my chair again and watching her respond to the charm of my friend's manner, I could not help wishing that Mr. Carville had seen fit to give us a little more of his wife's character in his narrative. It seemed to me that the dry, clear light of his recondite mind would have thrown into admirable gleams and shadows, gleams of humour and shadows of blind fate, the brilliant creature who sat before us. There was nothing material in her manner as she let her glance fall again upon the children. The gaiety superimposed upon her customary staid gravity seemed to have made her, not younger or less mature, but less domestic, more complex and mystifying. And I found myself recalling Mr. Carville's contemptuous moralizings upon the illusory nature of love. I tried, foolish as it may seem, to place myself intellectually in the place of a woman like Mrs. Carville, to conceive her probable fundamental attitude towards her offspring, trodden smooth and firm by the daily round of chores, an active, vigorous

mind in an active, vigorous body. . . . Well, this was journeyman's work, I suppose, for a novelist; yet for me it had a freshness and spice that led me on until I pulled up sharply and felt the pang of shame. I am continually torn in the conflict between realism and what are called "unworthy thoughts." If it were not for a fear of traducing my own character by an ambiguous phrase, I would confess to many "unworthy thoughts" of many worthy people. I suppress them, of course, as I suppressed these concerning Mrs. Carville's trip to New York and the secular gaiety that now sat like a diadem on Mrs. Carville's forehead; but I have them all the same.

I was roused by Mrs. Carville's rising and saying that the children must go to bed.

"Let them come in again soon," said Mac. "We would like to say 'any time,' you know, but we're like parsons and doctors, we work at home and we can't have holidays every day."

"I am glad they have been no trouble," she replied, regarding them with a preoccupied approval.

"Trouble!" My friend was indignant. "We haven't enjoyed ourselves so much in years, I assure you, Mrs. Carville. You've had a good time, you chaps, eh?" he asked them and they nodded with reminiscent delight shining in their eyes. "Bully!" said Beppo, and Ben, more taciturn, added an expressive glance at his brother that signified profound assent. I found their scarlet woolen caps while my friend expatiated upon the delightful privilege of having two such fine little

chaps. Mrs. Carville at first sought, by a quick glance at her hostess, some sympathy for her own soberer feelings in the matter. But Bill, though not caring for children to madness, had fallen in love with these two, and gave to them much of the credit for their pretty ways and well-bred habits that by right belonged to their mother. And so Mrs. Carville, seeing only corroborative enthusiasm in Bill's expression, turned to me.

"To us they are angels," I explained, laughing, "and you must permit us to love them in our own way. It is so easy to love without responsibility, you know."

She pondered this an instant, looking at me sombrely the while and then illumination came, and she flashed a glance of vivid answering intelligence and nodded.

"Yes," she said, turning to the door, and lifting the latch. "Yes," she repeated, opening the door and looking out into the night. "It is very easy."

And the next moment they were gone and we were alone once more.

"Gee!" said my friend, yawning. "If I'm not all in!"

"You've both got to go straight to bed," said his wife briskly. "You won't be worthy thirty cents in the morning, and you'll just loaf round and . . ."

The telephone bell whirled and Mac closed his mouth abruptly on his third consecutive yawn and sprang to the instrument. We sat and watched. There was some little trouble on the line at first, common in party lines where outside bells some-

times ring and the owners have to be pacified. Then "Oh yes"——"Yes, I hear you——Yes" and a long unintelligible series of affirmatives in different keys. My friend's face and figure gradually lost all appearance of fatigue. His eyes sharpened and glared at us over the receiver as he listened and said "yes" with exasperating reiteration. His wife signalled dolefully to me that it was probably a bird's-eye view, and she'd never get him up in the morning to catch the seven o'clock. It occurred to me at the time that bird's-eye views are not usually ordered at ten o'clock at night; but I was too absorbed in watching my friend's expression of bewilderment, doubt, delight and anticipation in rapid succession, and I did no more than shrug. At length he smiled broadly, remarked, "Right. I'll get busy. See you later, Jimmy. G'bye," and rang off. And then, to my amazement and his wife's indignation, he threw his heels in the air and walked across the room on his hands!

"What's the matter with you?" she asked severely. Assuming a conventional position again, and walking up and down with his hands in his pockets, he told us the cause of his excitement.

"It's Jimmy Larkin in the *News* Building. He's got a big job on. Got to go south and wait for orders. He's got a pal in the Navy at Norfolk, and he's phoned that they'd just received a wireless from a cruiser in the West Indies somewhere to say she'd spoken an aeroplane going north-west. They think it's that chap—you know?—and Lord Cholme of the *Morning's* springing something on us. Any-

how, Jimmy's got the assignment and he's put me in too, to do some hurry-up sketches on the spot if we're lucky."

"Not to-night!" said Bill, aghast.

"Sure, to-night. I'll have to take the trolley into Newark and join Jimmy on the New Orleans Limited there."

"Then," I said, "this is a wild-goose chase after our neighbour's brother?"

Mac is an extremely practical man, and he merely shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe, old man. Whether it's him or somebody else, the story has to be covered, and we're away to cover it. It might mean a staff job later for the *News*, eh?"

"It's quite a romance," I remarked.

"Romance nothing—it's bread and butter, man! Where's my grip? Oh yes, I remember." And he pranced away upstairs to the studio to pack the tools of his craft. His wife, who was looking out linen and hosiery and all the things a woman firmly believes a man can never remember for himself, and without which he is a mere shivering forked radish, found time to order me to bed, but was drawn away immediately into an argument concerning the climate in the south. My friend, evidently viewing underwear, remarked that he was going south, not north to Labrador, and where was his seersucker suit. He was informed that his seersucker suit had been in the rag-basket for years, and, anyway, her husband wasn't going on a trip without adequate clothing. I reached for my boots and put them on. It seemed to me it was my duty to see him safely

into his berth on the Limited. After some ten minutes of vigorous packing and debate, they came down, and found me ready.

"You aren't going too?" cried Bill.

"To the train," I said. "He might fall asleep on the road."

If I had hoped to get much more information out of him by going into Newark, I was disappointed. The question of the Carvilles and their adventures had been wiped clean from his mind by the more immediate and personal affair of an assignment. I am afraid that even if I had had a part in this amusing attempt to forestall the other papers I would still have been more interested in the airman than in the astonishing enterprise on which he was engaged. I could not bring myself to gape at scientific marvels. As I have said before, let Science do her worst: humanity remains the same fascinating enigma.

And yet, as we sat in the empty, rattling car, our feet crunching the pea-nut shells and chicle coverings of some Passaic joy-riders, and my friend discussed with enthusiasm the probable outcome of the expedition, I realized that, after all, I could not expect him to share my burden. For good or ill the writer must carry with him for ever the problem of the human soul. The plastic artist has his own problems of light, and mass, and the like. And from this I came back circuitously to Mr. Carville. I was puzzled to find a name for the deliberate rejection of his responsibilities as an artist. One could not call him a renegade or a coward, for he was

neither. And yet his acceptance of an obscure destiny had in it nothing of the sacredness of renunciation. It was almost as though he were hoarding his soul's wealth, and adroitly avoiding any of the pangs and labours of the spiritual life. Because it seemed to me that, for a man of his receptivity, the normal bovine existence of the humble folk among whom he lived was out of the question. He knew too much, was too alive to the shifting lights and shadows of life, to sit, like grey-haired Saturn, "quiet as a stone." Perhaps he had some unknown ulterior ambition on which he was brooding through the years. I had read of such cases, though I confess I always suspect the biographer of a picturesque imagination. He sees too clearly. He is wise after the event. It seems that the roots of a man's virtue are hidden, after all.

We had not long to wait when we reached the station. The long, black, heavy train rolled in and we climbed into a Pullman. A broad, red face, with upstanding Irish hair above it, was thrust through a pair of lower berth curtains. Mr. Larkin was known to me slightly as a "live-wire." I explained why I had come to the opposite berth which was reserved. While my friend was settling with the conductor, I took the opportunity to sound Mr. Larkin, who was offering me a cigar. He nodded vigorously.

"Sure. It's that whats-his-name guy—Frank Lord he calls himself. I've been covering all that flyin' dope in England since 'way back, and I knew Lord Cholme had some stunt coming. Ah, that's

it—Carville. Yep. His stage name's Lord. No, he can't come all the way at one lap. You must be crazy. He'd want a ship load of gasoline. We had it all planned years ago. North or south he must go. Barometer's been steady now all over the Atlantic, so he's gone south—Madeira, Azores, Barbados and so on. Hits America in Florida maybe, where it's easy landin' among all them bayous and swamps. Oh we'll get him all right, don't you worry."

"And where do you stop?" I asked.

"Rocky Mount, if we get no news beforehand."

I got out, and the train moved off on the ninety-mile spin to Philadelphia. I wondered if I had displayed a genuine sporting interest. I was very tired, and the four-mile journey in the trolley-car was tedious. As I passed the dark house next door, Mrs. Carville's voice came back to me as she caught the meaning of my words that evening. I had said it was easy to love without responsibility, and she had answered with an eagerness of assent that I could not forget. I had at times experienced the evanescent and perilous temptations of that love that needs no understanding, the love that lights no torch, and is but a vagrom fancy crossing the beaten tracks of life . . . for an instant I stood, with the key in my hand, and pondered the next house and the sombre secret of which it was the symbol. On the horizon the great light on the Metropolitan Tower flashed the hour of midnight.

As I let myself in, it occurred to me that Mr.

Carville would be walking to and fro, smoking a meditative pipe beneath the stars, his thoughts, no doubt, flying westward like enigmatic night-birds, and hovering above the home towards which he was speeding.

CHAPTER XIV

DISCUSSION

ONE of the immemorial customs of New York, whenever a stranger arrives from across the sea, should he by any chance have ever done anything, anywhere, is to give him a show. When you understand the root-principle of this practice, you are on the way to understanding New York, and incidentally, America. For in spite of many cynical arguments to the contrary, I remain satisfied that New York is, after all, part of the United States. Just as Broadway is a rather over-illuminated Main Street, so the metropolitan press is a highly concentrated Local Interest. You arrive on an ocean liner instead of on the Limited, but the principle is the same. You come from foreign parts, from effete Europe; you are a distinguished stranger, and everybody, in the person of their press, turns out to stare and cheer and find out your opinion of our glorious country. It is true that, after a few days of embarrassing publicity, your photograph vanishes from the daily sheets, your hotel ceases to be besieged by public emissaries asking your opinion of Mr. Roosevelt, Baked Beans or Twilight Sleep; you discover (with a pang) that you are forgotten, and a French Scientist or an Italian Futurist, or a Russian Nihilist has taken your place. But that, after all, may be the extent of your merits. You have had your show.

New York has given your hand a jovial, welcome squeeze. The most hospitable hosts cannot forever regard you as a new arrival. You pass on, and others take the floor in the spot-light and register surprise, pleasure, indignation, criticism or whatever their peculiar talent may dictate. And this custom of the town is not at all comparable with the reception accorded St. Paul when he arrived at Athens and found the citizens of that republic hankering after some new thing. It is at the other end of the scale of human motives. It is the curiosity and enthusiasm of youth rather than the prurience of age. It is, in its way, a test of character. You may have weathered adversity with credit. New York will see how you behave in prosperity. I often suspect the headline which says that So-and-So won't talk, to cover a good deal of moral cowardice. So-and-So has probably become afraid of the intoxicating fumes of publicity. Fame, he discovers, blended with the unfamiliar high-tension atmosphere of Manhattan Island, is heady stuff. He finds many of his old notions burst asunder amid so much noise and light and swift movement. He will, if he be British, feel constrained to run down England, just as later on, when he returns to London, he will write a book running down America. So-and-So flies from temptation and "refuses to talk."

All this is more or less *apropos* of Mr. Francis Lord's arrival in New York after having crossed the Atlantic in a sea-plane. As a matter of fact Mr. Francis Lord was making for Key West, when

what is called engine-trouble caused him to descend to the surface of a perfectly smooth sea. The weekly mail-boat from Belize to New York was speeding up the Florida Channel when the officer of the watch made out a large triplane ahead of him. It was apparently trying to rise, but without success. The course of the steamer was altered to bring her more in the way of the machine. Just as they were approaching, the triplane rushed across their bows, rose out of the water, and instead of "banking," slid down side-ways, completely submerging the right-hand planes. The ship was stopped and a boat lowered. According to the laconic report of the commander, who seemed more anxious to claim a record for his boat-crew than to share the glory of salving an eminent airman's life, they had the boat up and were under way again inside of eighteen minutes. And so Mr. Francis Lord arrived in New York in the usual prosaic way, and our enterprising friends, accompanied by a score of other hunters of "scoops," had to return hastily. It does not appear, however, that they would have gained anything had they remained, because the astute Lord Cholme had provided a press-agent. This gentleman, we heard long afterwards, was in Savannah superintending the first rehearsals of a gigantic film-drama depicting the Conquest of the Atlantic. On hearing of his principal's arrival on a steamer he took the next train north, and from the moment he reached Mr. Francis Lord's hotel on Fifth Avenue, Mr. Francis Lord seemed lost to view. We found in the papers no

interviews with Mr. Lord. He "refused to talk." The press-agent, however, handed out type-written statements about the trip, the islands where landings were made, the readings of the instruments, the difficulties which ended in capsizing the machine almost in sight of land, the time taken, the speed in miles per hour, the distance travelled, the records made and broken. He handed out accounts of the lives of M. D'Aubigné, the inventor, Lord Cholme, the promoter, and Mr. Francis Lord, the airman. He handed out photographs of the three. He handed out plans of the triplane. The reporters grew tired of seeing the press-agent, for he invariably handed out some deadly-dull document without the ghost of a story attached to it. The kindly human side of the great adventure seemed non-existent. The public wanted to know what the great man really looked like, what he had for breakfast, where he went in the evening, what he thought of Fifth Avenue, of the Woolworth Building, of our glorious country. And it followed naturally that since Mr. Francis Lord maintained his silence and invisibility, it devolved upon the Press to provide imaginative replies to all these burning questions. They described Mr. Francis Lord, they drew pictures of him in original attitudes, they reported rumours of his movements, they conjectured and arranged his future plans, they concocted competitions between him and illustrious American airmen, they professed to have heard that a Swiss was already preparing to beat Mr. Francis Lord's record by a flight from Lake Geneva to Lake Erie,

they used all their genius to make a public success of Mr. Francis Lord and his achievement.

And then they dropped him.

To us, reading the news day by day after breakfast, it was, of course, inevitable. I think my friend felt it more than I, for he has a profound faith in publicity. It is the secret of his success as a publicist, I suppose. His theory is, that no matter how good your article may be, you cannot sell it unless you advertise. You must boom, you must shout and show yourself and talk to people. You must "get next." He calls it "making an appeal." He thinks Mr. Francis Lord and his wonderful press-agent had not played up to the great traditions of American newspaper life. He sketched lightly for me a plan which he and Larkin agreed would have "put him across."

"But," I argued mildly, "what could he do? Do you propose he should hire a theatre and exhibit himself? Why should he *want* to be advertised?"

My friend made a movement of impatience.

"You miss the whole point," he retorted. "Why did Whistler wear that white lock of hair of his? Why did Wilde start that Green Carnation stunt? Why did Chamberlain wear a monocle, or Gladstone those big collars?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," I said feebly, "unless it was . . ."

"It was simply to fix their personalities in the public mind. If you've done a big, wise thing, the public won't take any notice of you unless you do some little, silly thing."

"I wish you'd tell the public this, old man," I said.

"The public don't give a darn," he returned grimly.

"Evidently they don't in this case. And I don't see why they should, if you ask me. Even suppose he *had* crossed the Atlantic, which he hasn't, for he fell into the sea—even suppose he had, what of it? Would his walking up Fifth Avenue in pink tights with an arum lily in his hand . . ."

But my friend was gone upstairs to his studio and my subtle sarcasm was lost. We look at this question of public performances from different angles. When we heard of a neighbour's son earning ten dollars every Saturday by going up in a balloon and descending in a parachute (very often alighting upon some embarrassingly private roof) Mac thought it very creditable of him and mighty poor pay. I contended that it was a good deal more than the job was worth, because it was worth exactly nothing. It was not worth doing. This, of course, laid me open on the flank. My friend suggested that this might be said of a good deal of literary work, and I admitted with a sigh that he was right. "There you are," said he, and we both laughed.

"Well," I said, at lunch, "I grant your premises. Why should this chap wish to fix his personality on the public mind?"

"Can't you see? To put his value up, of course."

"Doing . . . why, of course, he's doing it for money. Who ever does anything in this infernal world except for money?"

"But since he failed—as he did, you remember—he hasn't any value to speak of."

Mac turned in despair to his wife.

"Did you ever see such a chap in your life? You'd think, to hear him, he'd never heard of appropriations for publicity campaigns, or advertising schemes. Things do themselves in his world—you don't even have to drop a nickel in the slot!"

Bill regarded me with attention.

"He's got something up his sleeve," she remarked, sagely. "If he keeps us guessing we'll send him to New York to have his Christmas dinner by himself."

"I'm not going to keep you guessing," I said, "but I haven't been able to get a word in edgeway yet. Leaving the great cosmic question of publicity, of which I get rather tired at times in spite of its lucrative side, I want to call your attention to something—I was going to say under our noses—something close by."

They gazed at me in doubt and then looked at each other. Mac made allusion, tapping his forehead the while, to the strain of Christmas work. And they shook their heads.

"Well, go on," humoured Bill, rising to bring in the coffee.

"What's this wonderful something you've discovered?"

"I have reason to believe," I said, without look-

ing up from my plate, "that Mrs. Carville had a visitor last night."

"No!" they ejaculated in unison. I nodded.

"You miss something by sleeping at the back. Just as I was comfortably in bed, the room was flooded with the blinding white glare that indicates a passing automobile. This particular white glare, however, did not vanish as usual. It remained. My attention, which was only partially aware of it, gradually became undivided and led me to sit up and look out. A large car stood opposite the house next door, the two headlights showing up the roadway and sidewalk all down the street. Even as I watched, a tall figure came down from the house and the lights went out. I could see the car plainly as a dark mass under the trees. And that, for the best part of half an hour, was all I did see. I lay down again and tried to focus my mind on this problem. I don't mind admitting I am still without a solution. I lay there thinking all sorts until the white glare suddenly illuminated the room again. I looked out. The car moved, turned slowly round, and sped away down Pine Street."

They sat and looked at me.

"I know I ought to have told you before," I said, "but the fact is I was so puzzled this morning when I woke and remembered the incident, that I didn't know what to do. It seems silly, if you look at it in the cold light of day, to draw any conclusions from such a trivial thing. I mean, if we had known nothing about them . . ."

"You think he's visiting her?" said Bill gravely.

"I didn't say so," I answered, "but the notion was in my mind, certainly. If so, why should he not? If Mac had a brother, and he came to New York he would not hesitate to come and see you."

"Not in the middle of the night," she objected.

"No, unless he was pressed for time, and had, shall we say, more urgent claims on his attention."

"Perhaps he came to visit his brother, not knowing he was away just now."

"I thought of that too. Where is he supposed to be just now?"

"Lord? Jimmy said he was up-state visiting Gottschalk, the millionaire who is backing the Aerial Mail Company."

Nobody spoke for a minute or two. At length my friend rose and pushed his chair up against the table.

"Ah, well," he said, looking for his pipe, "we can't sit here chewing the rag all day."

I was sitting at my desk, biting my pen and staring absently at the whitey-brown vista of the garden with the cold blue ridge of the Orange Mountains showing through the delicate tracery of the wind-swept trees, when I heard Bill moving about the room behind me.

"You're not working," she observed perfunctorily. I nodded assent. I often wonder, to tell the truth, when I *do* work. Even when no one is by to tell me of it, I seem to spend most of my time in idleness.

"I was thinking," I said. Perhaps I was. She came up to my chair and looked out too.

"About—you know—last night?" she asked.

"Yes, I was thinking you, being a woman, would know better than I whether there is a storm brewing."

She was silent, merely looking out at the wintry landscape.

"I feel," I went on, "that being a rather dried-up old bachelor puts me at a disadvantage. What can I know of such a situation as we imagine? I, who jog along from day to day, a journeyman scribbler! What knowledge or experience have I of the heights and depths of passion? What can Peeping Tom know about it?"

"Don't!" she said. "We're all Peeping Toms, as far as that goes. I'm sure," she went on, "it's very difficult to guess what's in the mind of a woman like her. She's very handsome, you know. She's one of those women who are rather puny and pathetic in their 'teens, with appealing eyes, but who grow big and healthy later. Marriage does wonders for them."

"If the marriage is happy," I remarked casually. The silence that followed was so long that I twisted round in my chair. There was an odd expression on my friend's face, a commingling of wisdom, pity and reminiscence.

"What have I said?" I asked.

"No marriage is happy," she said gravely.

"Yes!" I responded.

"Not in the sense you understand the term. That's what we mean when we say you don't know anything about it. Marriage suits some men and

women more than others, but that isn't to say the people it suits are any the happier. In fact, it's often the other way. They're frightfully unhappy at times. Very few married women haven't been on the point of—of making a dash for freedom at some time or other. Women you wouldn't accuse of a single rebellious thought all their born days. You'd say they were crazy. Perhaps so, at the time. They get all on edge. Weak, weedy women are different. They haven't the same call for freedom, somehow."

"What do you mean by this dash for freedom business?" I asked. Bill looked at me solemnly.

"Marriage is a ring-fence round a pretty small patch, as a rule," she observed. "A woman goes into it gladly. She feels young and weak and ignorant, and when she's married she feels *safe*. But when she grows up to her full stature of mind and body, and she's no longer weak and ignorant, it's different. It's no longer safety first with her."

"But love . . . 'I began. She stopped me.

"Oh, love's got nothing at all to do with it, you sentimental old thing. How old was Juliet—fourteen, wasn't she?" she asked suddenly, staring out of the window. I nodded.

"Well, there you are!" She has many of her husband's expressions. "At thirty-two, say, she would have been a fine, big, handsome woman, knowing the world and alive all round. The chances are *she* would have had a storm, as you call it."

"If she'd married Romeo?" I asked.

"'T wouldn't matter who she'd married," she re-

plied, rubbing her nose. "You're thinking of love again, I'll be bound. I'm not talking about love, my good man, I'm talking about life."

"Then you make no allowance for sentiment," I said.

"Oh don't I! I make any amount of allowance for sentiment. It's just sentiment such women as we are talking about have to watch. That's what you mean by love, I suppose. It is always prowling round the house, trying to get in. As a rule, there's no chance, for married women are too busy to be eternally thinking about love, though to read novels you'd think they were."

"A married woman, according to you, is a highly complex organism," I observed smiling.

"A married woman, according to me, is precisely what her husband has made her," she retorted, and adding, "Think that over while you get on with your work," she left the room.

But I continued to stare out of the window. Somehow I was stirred. There seemed to me something ominous in my own preoccupation with these affairs, affairs in which I could not, even had I the right, to meddle. My friend's laconic exposition only deepened the dramatic quality of the situation. For an author I had been singularly luckless in meeting drama in my life. I had often had my artistic cupidity excited by Mr. Carville, by the way he was continually having stimulating adventures of the soul. And what stirred me now was a vision of that sober, drab-grey little man, going about his business on the great waters, with this

portentous cataclysm hanging over his destiny. And yet, according to my friend, these perilous things were constantly on the brink in most men's lives. The smug, complacent commuting folk we knew all had these moments of almost unendurable stress, yet they gave no sign. I had a sudden sense of futility. As Mr. Carville had said on one occasion, we grope. We stumble against each other in the dark, we hear a whisper or two, or a cry, and the rest is silence. I understood, I thought, why so many writers avoid life, and content themselves with gay puppets in a puppet world. Life was too difficult, too dangerous, for play, and they can only play.

And then I heard the postman's knock, and sat waiting. Footsteps came down and went up again to the studio. Tea cups clinked. I realized that I had done nothing to the *brochure* I was writing since lunch. Lethargy is cumulative. The longer one idles the more difficult it is to make a start. I gave it up and put my pen away.

"A letter from Cecil," they said, as I appeared on the landing. Mac was crouching over an etching by the window, a big magnifying glass in his hand. I went over to him and he rose and handed the print to me.

"Oh!" I said. "This is indeed *apropos*."

It was an etching, by the painter-cousin, of the wrecked aeroplane of which he had spoken. As was fit and proper, it was a small plate, yet the effect upon the mind was of a vast open sky and infinite, rolling distances of land and sea. It brought

to mind the grey flatness of Essex, the lonely reaches of mud, the solitary house and the neighbourly hedges of the narrow roads. And it did this quite independently of the bizarre structure that lay athwart the foreground, like some immense disabled insect in a moment of exhaustion. It lay there, prone and motionless, a sprawling emblem of despair. And aloft, high up, as though in subtle mockery of the poor human endeavour below, a sea-bird soared with wings atilt, sweeping with effortless grace towards the grey sea.

"I don't care for remarques," muttered Mac, pointing to a sketch on the margin.

"Nor I," I agreed, "but this isn't on the plate, my friend. Moreover, I think it's rather interesting. It is Carville, I believe, Mr. Francis Lord of the New York Press."

It was a sinister face that we looked on, sketched on the impressed margin, and very different from the photos in the papers. The head had been caught in an attitude of leaning against a wall, so that the salience of the jaw, the flare of the nostrils, and the white of the eye were accentuated sharply. The brow was high, but (I fancied) pinched near the crown, and the large, cavernous nose gave the whole face an expression of bird-like rapacity that was corroborated by the full curved lips. And in the eye I fancied also that I detected a crazed look.

"Good gracious!" said Bill. "What a bad-looking man!"

I was silent, merely returning the print so that my friend might study the weaknesses of a brother-

artist. We agreed that the ink had dragged in one corner. Bill handed me the painter-cousin's letter.

“High Wigborough,
“Essex.

“DEAR BILL—

“I was in the village this afternoon and called at the post-office for some stamps, and the old lady who keeps the place, which is about seven feet square, and hardly high enough to yawn in, was sticking up a fresh notice about the Xmas mails, giving the latest dates for foreign parts. This reminded me I owed you a letter, and here it is with tons of good wishes to everybody for a happy time and no end of prosperity in the coming year. When are you coming over to spend a holiday with us? You'd love this part of the world. I'm sure you'd love the old lady at the post-office as much as you do the young lady at the post-office over there. She's a beautiful old person, really. She lives in a cottage set well back from the road, with rose-trees on each side of a narrow, flagged path, and honeysuckle all over the house right up to the thatch, which is quite a yard thick. I have a water-colour of her, sitting outside her door, with the Royal Arms and *Georgius Rex* just showing over her cap, and a fat tabby cat asleep on the threshold. It was late summer when I did it, and the air was warm gold with purple shadows. I know it is a detestable trick to talk painter's shop, but I can't help it sometimes. I am reminded of this by the experiences I've had recently with my friend Carville,

who now appears in the daily press rather frequently under his flying name of Francis Lord. There is a great row on between the papers owned by Lord Cholme (known as the Stunt Press) and the few other miserable rags which try to survive. I don't pretend to know what it's all about. There is, you know, an Aerial Telephone Company, promoted by Cholme and a lot of other guinea-pigs. Carville, I believe, wanted shares, or a seat on the board, or something, if he flew to America under their auspices. You know how jealously these moneyed people guard the sources of their wealth. Anyhow, negotiations hung fire, for Carville has D'Aubigné quite under his influence, and nothing could be done with the aeroplane or the patents until these two came in somehow. The rival newspapers go it blind, and sling all sorts of journalistic mud about. I won't bore you with it in a Xmas letter. What I was going to say was about Carville himself. He simply says 'No!' and goes on with his (to him) intensely interesting '*affaires*.' And here is one of those coincidences, as the old lady at the post-office calls them. I was at an at-home in Chelsea one Sunday not long ago, and met a Mrs. Hungerford, Carville's grand *bien-aimée*, on and off, for a long time. She had recently married a wealthy Australian, who was also present, a large, subdued creature. My hostess was Mrs. Chase, the wealthy widow who married poor Enderby Chase the artist. I forget whether you ever met them. Superb woman, fit to be a duchess, though she says her ideal existence is to be an artist's wife,

and she has an astonishing house on Cheyne Walk, with stabling for nine horses on the ground floor, and a stupendous yellow family victoria that Watkyns calls a Sarsaparilla waggon. Chase died a few years ago, you know, and his widow has elevated his memory into a sort of cult. She bought in all his really good pictures—dreary landscapes of the Smeary School!—and instead of framing them, she has had them panelled into the walls of the salon. I know this is the right way to ‘hang’ pictures, but I’ll be hanged if I like it. I kept thinking of chocolate boxes! I suppose the walnut wainscotting gave me the idea. One of Enderby’s pictures, his one-time famous *Astarté*, though he knew no more about *Astarté* than about Montezuma, was hung in a gold frame in the dining-room. Chase was no good at figures and it was Mrs. Hungerford’s remark to me, that Enderby’s *Astarté* if found in Regent Street would get three months without the option of a fine, that lured me to her side later. I went with Watkyns, with whom I was having lunch in his studio on the Walk. He discovered one of Mrs. Chase’s cards on his mantel-piece and as it is her rule to bring a friend, we went. In spite of her worship of painters for Enderby’s sake, Mrs. Chase really adores music and musicians. She has a Bechstein grand standing on an oak floor polished like glass, with tiger and bear-skins lying about. I am rather helpless among musicians. Mrs. Hungerford is a tall, thin girl about thirty, with curious flat, grey eyes that are most puzzling to meet unless she is smiling, which is only seldom. I had made

an apologetic reference to my utter ignorance of Ravel and all the new men, and she replied drily that I wasn't missing much. I said I felt the lack of musical knowledge when talking to musicians.

"‘They want you to feel it,’ she said. ‘Musical people don’t seem to have any minds, only vanity.’ And, by Jove, it exactly expressed what I had often felt. After supper we became chummy and sat in a corner talking about art and all sorts of things. She struck me as extremely *experienced*, as though her ideas were all original and had come from her own contact with life. I suppose knowing so many clever men has caused this. I mentioned Carville as one of the most remarkable men I’d ever met, and she said calmly, ‘Yes, he is. I know him very well.’ I suddenly remembered the other side of Carville’s manifold nature and asked if I had made a mistake. She said with a laugh, ‘Not at all. I understand him perfectly. We are excellent friends when we meet.’

"‘Well,’ I said, ‘if you understand him, it is more than I do,’ and I told her how Carville would come over to my place and prowl round the studio and watch me at work. I said I thought he ought to settle down. She laughed again and her grey eyes became luminous.

"‘He will never do that,’ she said. ‘He is under some curse, I think. He complains he is forever doomed to be under the influence of inferior women. Inferior women are quite a hobby of his.’ I remarked that she seemed to know him very well and her eyes became dead blank again. I asked

if she knew the family, and she nodded. He has a brother, clever too, but in a different way. 'Oh, what became of him?' I asked. 'I suppose,' she said, 'he married some worthy middle-class creature and settled down somewhere. He wrote a book, but it didn't sell. I didn't read it. It was about machinery and the sea, and I loathe the sea. It bores me.'

"Well, my dear Bill, I'll bore you if I run on like this much longer. But I was very much struck by this girl of whom D'Aubigné had told me, especially as she mentioned your neighbour, and in view of Carville's antics. He never mentions his own affairs, as indeed why should he? But he seems, as he stands or sits watching me at work (for I have at last knocked it into his head that *light* is more precious to an artist than conversation) he seems to be eternally bothered by the fundamental differences that exist among men. He asks 'Why do you *do* it?' Now imagine the mind of a man who asks an artist why he paints! He will stare at my plate as I work, with his big black brows knitted, as if in a trance. And suddenly he will shrug his shoulders and take up his hat and go off without a word. Sometimes he doesn't come for several days. The last time I saw him was a week ago. I must tell you about it. I felt all cramped and muggy, and as the day was fine, biked over to the aerodrome. When I arrived D'Aubigné was looking through a pair of prism glasses. 'Where's Carville?' I said as I got off. He handed me the

glasses and pointed up between two masses of billowy clouds. I stared and finally focussed on a minute speck against the blue. It was incredible, and, I think, sublime. I must say it thrilled me to see it. It is something new in life, if not in art, this supreme triumph over gravity. I am serious! Slowly he passed behind the cloud and I came back to earth. 'How high is he?' I asked casually, and it was like a match to tinder. D'Aubigné's battered, sensual old face lighted up and he cackled, 'How high? How do I know! Come. We will ask him!' As you may imagine, I nearly fell over in my surprise. He led the way to a hutch on which a tall tripod carried an aerial. There were no windows, and it appeared to be a kind of sound-proof call-box, which indeed it was. We went in and as the door closed, a cluster of three green lights, very small but of extraordinary brilliance, showed up above a set of instruments. D'Aubigné sat down and put a pair of receivers to his ears. I could just see a triangular hole in front of him. He began to pull plugs out of various holes and insert them in other holes, and presently he laughed and said, '*Comment!*' and laughed again. Then, 'A gentleman wishes to know your altitude at this moment. What is the reading?' A silence and then, 'Four thousand metres? So! Wait!' He got up and offered me the receivers. I sat down and put them on, and immediately seemed to be in the midst of the wildest uproar. It was like kettle-drums playing in a high wind. I could distinguish the thunder of the exhausts, for there were two

engines and one of them was missing badly and making noises like gun-shots. 'Speak!' said D'Aubigné into my neck, so I said, 'Hullo, are you there, Carville?' And a thin, high, metallic voice, like a gramophone's, sounded among the noises. 'Yes, I'm here. What's up?' 'Oh,' I said, 'I'm only trying this thing. How are you?' No reply for a moment, and then, 'I say, you don't mind if I cut you out, do you . . . Having a beastly time with my port engine?' 'Sorry,' I said. There was no answer. I told D'Aubigné what Carville had said, and we went out into the open air again. You know, it seems marvellous, though I don't suppose it's any more so than many other inventions. But to think of that chap, nearly thirteen thousand feet in the air, actually talking to us down on the earth while he was wrestling with a battery or sparking plug, or something! Think of him sitting in the midst of that mass of metal and fabric, between the two thundering engines, doing six things at once, rushing along at sixty miles an hour, alone, magnificently alone, with the three lights of the instrument shining like emeralds in the sunlight! Upon my word, I was so upset with the extraordinary novelty of the whole experience that I had some difficulty in getting into harness again. Talk of Glorious Art indeed! D'Aubigné says Carville is an ass about Art. But has he not compensations?

"We went over to their living rooms next to the workshops and D'Aubigné made tea. I said it was a splendid thing and he ought to be awfully bucked

up at having achieved such a success. He shrugged his shoulders. 'I am depressed,' he said. 'This country,' and he waved his hand towards the landscape outside, 'is very depressing. Earth, sea, and sky. Earth, sea, and sky. Nothing else. Flat, primitive like the day after Creation. Look!' He pointed to where a barge, brought up on the tide, lay stranded in a field of shining mud. 'That is the Ark, but Noah and all the animals save we are dead. I have none of the Dutchman's love for dikes and canals. I shall go to the Mediterranean.' 'And Carville?' I said. He cackled. 'Carville will go to the devil, I suppose. You are to blame. You have recalled memories, I understand. He talks to me of Rosa. Rosa! I am sick of the name. You would think he had learned that women are all the same. No. He has the profound illusion. He is enchanted. Rosa!'

"Of course, you must take all this with reserve. D'Aubigné, being artist and man of science, has a vivid imagination. But he understands Carville, and appreciates the difference between him and the average libertine. With Carville it is always a *grande affaire*. For the time, as D'Aubigné quaintly puts it, his love is like a red, red rose. And I relate my adventures to you because you have roused my interest in your neighbours and it is only fair for me to reciprocate.

"If it doesn't get lost on the way there is a small package coming by this mail. Bon Noël! And, by the way, you will see on the margin of the etching

I send you a small sketch of Carville's head. What do you think of it? He came in while I was pulling a proof of this plate and looked at it curiously. 'My smash?' he inquired, and I said, 'Yes, your smash, old chap. How do you like it?' And he asked me, as he often does, 'Why do you *do* it?' He seems to have some sense missing in his make-up. He can't coordinate the actions of men. Perhaps that is the key to his character. D'Aubigné, who used to paint, as a student, vast canvases depicting Prehistoric Man fighting a mammoth, or Perseus chopping up Gorgons, said it was a good plate and wished he had gone in for etching. I fear he is like many painters—he doesn't realize the drudgery and technical labour involved. Let me know your opinion soon.

"All good wishes,

"Cecil."

Our canary, who rejoices in the name of Richard the Lion-hearted, chirped for his customary morsel of cake, and I rose to give it to him. Mac was showing his wife the dragged line in the etching. Having rationed Richard, I stood looking out of the window. A keen wind was blowing and fine powdered snow drove over the open lot across the street. Coming up over the frozen grass I saw a tall figure in a scarlet cloak. The vigour of her gait deceived me at first, for it was the light trip of a girl in her teens, and then I saw that it was Mrs. Carville. I did not speak, but watched her, with lithe figure and features aglow, cross the street to

her home. It seemed to me that I had no right to call attention to what I saw or imagined. Even if it were true, as my friend had said, as Mr. Carville himself, in his homely way, had remarked, that women, even more than girls, are the victims of evanescent illusions, that they abandon themselves, at times, to quite impossible and romantic dreams, I should be wise to stand aside. I felt that, after all, Miss Fraenkel's crystal-clear bromidity would be a delightful change after so much intense living and introspection. For that evening, after dinner, as I listened to the music of the Steersman's Song from the *Flying Dutchman*, it seemed only too likely that even after all these years, so deathless is passion in some hearts, the skilled hand of Frank Carville might set a woman's soul vibrating with some of the old ecstasy.

CHAPTER XV

CONCLUSION

IT was a white Yule-tide that year. Late on Christmas Eve I crept carefully and circuitously up to the house next door and deposited our little parcel of gifts in the shadow of the porch. In an hour my tracks were covered. Sleights passed, in the stealthy fashion of sleighs, the jingle of harness and bells mingling, the muffled figures of the riders looking strangely like stuffed effigies in the white radiance of the reflecting snow. And next morning, when I woke early, snow was still falling. But at breakfast, rather late in honour of the day, the sky was swept to a clean, clear transparent azure, and the sun shone with dazzling brightness on road and roof. Working industriously with our broad wooden shovels to clear a path from the porch to the street, I stole a glance next door. I was rather glum, I remember, to discover no sign of life, and later, over hot whisky, we debated whether we were really well enough acquainted to give presents. It is a habit of ours, however, very hard to break. Our idea is to give something which the recipient will like, and this involves thought, which is the essence and true spirit of giving. Some days before I had been despatched to Chinatown for the express purpose of buying coloured tops, snakes and kites. Bill had made Indian suits for the boys, and Mac had returned from the stores

with a coasting sled, and a small pair of roller skates. Miss Fraenkel was to have a copy of Spenser's *Faery Queen* bound by us in blue leather and stamped with an original design. As Bill often says, we can make anything in the world except money. Curiously enough, it seems to me now, we forgot Mr. Carville. Perhaps that too helps to describe him, for he gave me the impression of being so utterly complete in himself, so very independent of the trivial human weaknesses and needs on which Christmas essentially depends, that a present to him was out of the question. We did not envy him this position. We simply forgot him in the general rush of seasonable sentiment, and put ourselves to all sorts of delightful inconvenience in discovering what his family would like. And when, later in the fore-noon, as we were sitting round the studio stove, we heard a clatter of skates in the porch, and a single knock, as though some small person had stood atip-toe to reach the Canterbury Pilgrim, I am not ashamed to say we went down in a body to open the door. Messrs. Giuseppe Mazzini and Benvenuto Cellini stood without, the former with his sled over his shoulder, both muffled to the chin, their red cheeks and bright eyes beautiful to behold.

"Hullo!" I said. "Now, where did you get those?"

Benvenuto looked down critically at the new leather straps of the skates.

"Ma says," began Beppo, as though reciting a lesson, "Ma says, we thank you very much for the

things and"—he glanced at his brother, who was watching him—"and we wish you a Merry Christmas."

"Thank you. Same to you," we said, filling the doorway. "Where are you going now?"

"Pine Street," said Beppo.

"Skates not much use now, eh?"

"Oh, he's just tryin' 'em," it was explained.

"Well, good luck. Eat plenty of turkey, and come and see us again soon."

They seemed hesitating about something, looking bashfully at each other and then at us. We all looked down at them benevolently.

"You come too," muttered Beppo, and Ben put his hand into mine with a charming gesture.

It was my turn to hesitate. Mac laughed.

"Come on, old man," he said. "We'll both go."

And we did. For two solid hours, oblivious of churchgoers, we slid down Pine Street and toiled up Pine Street, rejoicing in the keen air, the flying snow, and the delighted shouts of the youngsters.

"Now come in and have some candy," said we.

As we knocked the snow off our boots in the porch Bill came to the door looking pleasantly excited.

"She's here!" she whispered, and we entered, struck suddenly dumb like children, took off our boots and went upstairs to the studio.

Quite naturally, Mrs. Carville had stepped in to thank her neighbour for the little leather Renaissance purse we had made for her. She embar-

rassed us yet more by rising when we came in. My friend, a most courteous and punctilious gentleman, begged her to be seated. She was wearing her scarlet cloak, and her eloquent dusky features were illumined with conflicting emotions.

"I did not know," she said as I was getting the box of candy. "I did not know that people could be so kind."

"It is Christmas," explained my friend lightly. "And we always like to be jolly, you know. When is Mr. Carville due?"

A swift shadow crossed her face and was gone.

"How can I know?" she replied. "Perhaps next week, perhaps . . . but I do not know."

"I was just saying," said Bill hurriedly, "what a pity he couldn't have got in for Christmas."

"Never," said Mrs. Carville, watching the children eating chocolates. "Never can he get in for Christmas. Every year it is the same since we are married. Always, always at sea."

She looked around at us vaguely, as though she feared, somehow, that we did not believe, or understand her. But I think we did. I think we saw suddenly the secret of this lonely woman's soul. We saw it as she looked round at us, the immediate and precipitous chasm between such a life as she led, and the life of one like my friend, ever close to her husband, understanding his whims, his fears, his hopes, his follies and his victories. We saw the desolation of the sea-wife, the long lonely nights, the ever-present apprehension of loss. We understood the pathos of the scaldino. And swift upon

this new interpretation we saw the great dangers of such a life to a woman of imperfect culture, strong passion and yet noble aspiration. We saw, too, another and more particular tragedy possible to her, in being forever debarred from her husband's innermost life. That vague look of distress was pregnant with meaning. She wished to say—how much! Yet in English she had not the words. For a moment there was a silence, and then once more she rose, this time to bid us adieu. We were all under an impulse, I have since learned, to press her to stay to dinner. Each was doubtful how the others would take it, and with reason, for this one feast of the year has taken on a sacramental character in recent times. We prefer, without any diminution of our Christian charity and goodwill, to eat it by ourselves. And so Mrs. Carville bade us good-bye, and was followed unwillingly by two young gentlemen who wanted to stay.

“I'll come over this evening and bring Ben and Beppo for an hour, may I?” I said.

“You must not let them be in your way,” she replied. The smile of the children was reward for a good deal of inconvenience.

“Mrs. Carville, you mustn't put it that way. We shall always be glad to have them, out of business hours. And to-night is holy to children everywhere. They shall light the candles on our tree. You know what Flaubert once said of children—‘a little thing like that in the house is the only thing that matters.’

Her eyes dropped to the heads of the children in

front of her, and her face became suddenly grave, set in a pose of quiet thought.

"Did he say so?" she remarked soberly. "Well, perhaps he was right." And she took the children by the hand and went out.

And we had them back in the evening, which became uproarious. My friend greeted them dressed up as Santa Claus, with an immense cotton-wool beard and motor-goggles. We initiated them into the mysteries of Hunt the Slipper and Musical Chairs. Indeed, when neighbours began to drop in, as they did later on, they interrupted five children playing Nuts in May. Foolish old parlour-tricks we had forgotten since our own early childhood came back to memory and evoked shrieks of laughter. At ten, when I took them, well wrapped up, down our snow-trench and along the side-walk to their own door, they were in a trance of mingled happiness and fatigue.

"Here they are, safe, Mrs. Carville," I said as she opened the door, "but very sleepy."

"You are very kind," she said. "They must go to bed. But you will come in, and drink a glass of wine? No?"

"Yes," I said, suddenly pushing aside the diffidence that years of literature had bred. "Yes, I will take a glass of wine with you, Mrs. Carville. To the coming year."

"Oh, but," she said, laughing over her shoulder as she led the way into the parlour, "Have you the gift of good fortune that you bring to me for this next year? I hope you have. Here is the wine.

My husband gets it when he goes to Ancona. The wine of Umbria. You like it?"

"To next year," I said as she filled two glasses from a large wickered flask. "And what is left of this," I added. She sat on a white chair in front of a wall covered with books, a brilliant, tragic, yet smiling figure of a beautiful woman, charming in the kindly coquetry of the moment. For that is how I interpreted her mood, that she divined my diffidence with feminine quickness and sought innocently enough to help me along. And I made up my mind to take the chance, should it appear, and warn her of what we had feared. She would take it from me, knowing of my diffidence. As she sat there, she filled one of my ideals: the robust and beautiful mother. I will have none of your pale, puling madonnas. I have never been under the influence of women, but I delight in them tall and strong and with the splendid beauty of health and maturity. Against her husband's books, which made a background of colour and gold like old tapestry for her head, she was a wonderful complexity of vigorous, abounding life and still decorative outline. She turned and looked at me after setting down her glass and found me watching her. She smiled in a friendly way.

"You know," she said, "we have bought a home on Staten Island? Well, when we are fixed, you will come and see us—when my husband is home. You will, all?"

"I will anyhow," I said. "I like your husband and I like your two boys, and . . ."

"And me?" she inquired with a smile that pursed her lips. "You no like me?" I laughed.

"I did not say that," I observed. "How could it be otherwise? Even though you will be offended, I must wonder if you know how much you mean to him."

"To him?" she echoed vaguely, in alarm.

"To your husband," I went on. "You see, he has told me a good deal of his life. And I think you have made all the difference in it. He is not a noisy man, you know, but he made it very clear at times how very much you mean to him."

She was looking at me steadily while I said this, stroking little Ben's head as he slumbered. Her eyes were very bright, and they searched my face relentlessly.

"And you think I do not know that?" she asked slowly.

"You will think me presumptuous to have said so much. You must forgive a shy man who means no ill. Of course, you know that. What I pray for this coming year is that you will not forget it."

There was a long silence, and I fixed my eyes on a brass ash-tray and a row of corn-cobs that stood on a little table by the radiator. At length she rose and gently lifted the children to their feet, holding them close to her.

"You think bad of me, then?" she queried in a curiously toneless voice.

"Who? I?"

"All of you."

"You know we do not. You must blame only

me for this. We think bad of you! Listen, Mrs. Carville. My business is with books and you may think I know nothing of the life you and your husband live. But my business is also with humanity. It is for humanity I live, for them I work, and their praise is my reward. I am, in a way, in love with humanity. All the time I want *people*. They are the only thing that matters. And this gives me a light on a good deal you might think I missed. I know how quickly people break and are carried away. I know the strongest are often the weakest. I know we often give way just when we feel strong. I know something of illusions. So I have spoken. To-morrow you will laugh and say, 'It don't matter what he thinks.' And I still wish you a Happy New Year. Will you wish me one? Because I love people, humanity, so much?" And I made my way, rather overcome by feeling, out to the hall. As I raised the latch to go out, I looked back at her. She stood at the parlour door, the light of the hall-lamp throwing her features into sharp relief.

"Wait," she said softly. I waited.

"You think bad of me?" she said again. "Why, what have I done?"

"No!" I said. "You wrong us. We should not dare . . ."

"Surely," she replied, looking at me in an odd, arch manner. "So I was thinking. Good night. It is Christmas. I do not think bad of you. Good night."

And then I was running through the snow.

I did not recount this conversation in all its de-

tails to the supper party I found in the studio. I wanted to think it out. I wanted to recall and consider this—to me—very unusual interview with a married woman. I was reminded, as I lay un-sleeping that night, of Mr. Carville's enigmatic saying that 'the things in books had always eluded him.' As one with a certain interest in books, I had remembered his words. And it seemed that, if I looked at life honestly, the things in books would elude me too. The problem occupied me for days. I was aghast at my own obtuseness, for I was unable to decide from Mrs. Carville's conduct what her real attitude towards us might be. I did not know whether she were wayward or not. I felt bitterly that such things could not happen in a book, in a best seller.

And when the days passed, white shrouded, and we discussed the theories we had made and demolished, I found to my astonishment that my friends had taken up a remote position on the subject. They were extremely doubtful about my story of the auto. Most likely, said they, it was a late Store delivery van. I had imagined so much. They paid detestable tribute to my imaginative powers. Married people are like this. With disconcerting abruptness, they wheel round together and go off at some incalculable tangent, serenely unconscious of any need for explanation. They made matters worse by harping on my imagination. And they capped all by declaring that I was a bad man and hoped I would keep my evil thoughts to myself at the Festive Season.

It is here that Miss Fraenkel interposed, all unconsciously, and became the cause of our presence at a most singular catastrophe, the collapse of the aeroplane in the snow. For had we not gone out that night to visit Miss Fraenkel and with her see the New Year safely born, we should have had no vivid memory of that terrible descent, nor understood how Fate had woven our neighbours' destinies, and how inexplicably she can drive to ruin at the moment of victory.

My friends had been to New York during the day, I remember, visiting friends in Lexington Avenue, and they mentioned at dinner a report in the paper that Mr. Francis Lord was to fly from the Gottschalk grounds, on the banks of Lake Champlain, to New York and give a demonstration of the aeroplane over the city. New machines had come from England, hope sprang eternal in the reporting breast, and events of staggering scientific import were foreshadowed. Other experts were pessimistic. They claimed their own apparatus was better than D'Aubigné's and so got a little advertisement for themselves. Other experts again blamed the administration in a vague way. An eminent actress was interviewed and spoke of her new telephone play without adding much to the national stock of wisdom. A famous evangelist of the rough-house type proposed to use the new apparatus for reaching distant settlements.

I don't think we took the news very seriously. We are, as I have said, inured to wonders and inclined to let science do her worst. We belong to

that class of people who, although they keep silent on the subject, hate science very heartily. My friend trumpets science loudly enough at times, I know; but he hates her in his heart, for he loves children and birds and flowers, and the colours of the distant hills when evening falls. And like us, he admires Miss Fraenkel, perhaps the most unscientific creature in the United States. He feeds her passion for details of English life in the most shameless way. On this particular evening he entranced her with a description of the Scottish custom of sitting on the plinth of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and welcoming the new year with bottles of whisky. Every Scotsman south of the Tweed was under oath to appear in the churchyard in kilts and tartan-plaid at midnight. Most of them, he added, wore red beards. Miss Fraenkel's fine hazel eyes grew round as she visualized this frightful throng gathered among the graves of the churchyard. It occurred to me that it only showed, after all, how difficult it is to convey in words a just notion of a foreign land, and 'how easy it is for "travellers' tales" to become incredible fabrications. How would the quiet townships of rural England, where the names of people and places go back to Saxon days, credit us if we told them of our tavern known as Slovitzy's, where citizens, of all the races of Europe, sang "Auld lang Syne"? Not in kilts, it is true, but in costumes even more surprising to the aforesaid quiet townships. We get a good deal of fun out of Miss Fraenkel, no doubt, but it may be that she, without ever giving away

the secret, gets a good deal of fun out of us. Sometimes there is a whimsical glint in her hazel eyes that makes me reflect . . .

We were chatting quietly, after we had left her, full of good resolutions, and we were climbing Pine Street, the deep snow making the passage difficult, when we heard the strange sound of the rejoicing in New York, twenty miles away. And it was without any thought of coming peril, without any thought of our neighbours, that we paused at the top of the ridge and looked across the valley. Indeed, we spoke of a previous New Year when we had sallied out from our flat and joined the tumultuous citizens in the streets. Above us was the dark blue sky of a wintry midnight, obscured here and there by indeterminate blotches of moving cloud, and far away to the eastward lay a long, low glare pierced by a single white light, the lantern of the Metropolitan Tower in New York.

We paused and stood close together upon the immediate edge of the vacant plot, now several feet deep in snow, our figures throwing long shadows upon the ghostly purity of the covering. And we became aware that we were not watching so much as listening, for on the freshening easterly wind there was borne such a rumour as men are not often permitted to make or to hear. It could scarcely be called a noise; it was rather a terrible and confusing *presence* translated into sound. So enormous was it, and so distant, that it enfolded us like a foreboding of disaster. It was as though one were listening to the cheering of innumerable

myriads on another planet. There was neither cessation to it nor paroxysm, neither surging up nor dying away. It was a continuous and prodigious drone. And the wonder of it was driven, if possible, a notch higher when it was known that this uproar was caused, not by the moans of a lost world falling down through inconceivable spaces to Gehenna, but by the million tin horns which the people of New York deemed a fitting tribute to the New Year. It was a fan-fare *in excelsis*, defying criticism and distance. It was the apotheosis of Manhattan, a sky-scraper of dizzy sound. It was, moreover, the expression of a primal and singularly innocent joy, the joy of a young nation on beholding a New Year. It was almost as though, in the cataclysm of hideous and unlooked-for calamities, in the vanishing of cities and kingdoms, in the irruption of mountains and the sinking of titanic ships beneath the waves, even the recurrence of the seasons had become an adventure and a matter of supreme wonder.

A million tin horns!

I suppose it was our preoccupation with the solemnity of the hour and the stupendous accompaniment of it that prevented our seeing at first a strange and disquieting signal. My friend suddenly grasped my arm and pointed to a black bank of cloud over Newark, where there shone a tiny constellation of three green lights. And the sound of New York's jubilation was forgotten. With murmured exclamations we stood with our faces raised towards this new yet familiar portent. And as we

gazed the green rays were borne beyond the cloud bank and were seen moving more and more rapidly against the dark blue of the star-lit heavens. Moved as by one impulse, we plunged into the snow and took a few steps, as though to gain a nearer view of this strangely beautiful object. Almost immediately it was above us and the thuttering roar of its machinery came dully to our ears in waves and sharp gusts of sound. And we cried "Oh!" involuntarily, for we could see the dark spread of the vans plunging frantically in the air. I remember I stretched out my arms in an impotent gesture of aid, for with the speed of a bird of prey the dark mass lurched in a flat swaying parabola towards the earth, spinning the while upon itself, and striking the deep bed of snow, burst into a mass of blinding flame.

So sudden was the catastrophe that we stood there in the brilliantly illuminated snow, rigid with stupefaction, staring at the intense glare. A patrolman rushed up to us and asked in a scared way what it was. Receiving no reply, he ran forward a few steps, throwing us into temporary shadow, looked round uncertainly, and then struck with a fresh idea, plunged into the road and made for the fire call-box at the corner. And almost as though his presence had been the cause of the fire, it dimmed, flickered, flared and went out, leaving us in darkness. Slowly we moved towards it. The patrolman came back. We reached a black hole in the snow and tripped over twisted snarls of wire. We heard the patrolman asking urgently what had happened.

"It is finished, all finished," I said vaguely.

"Sure," he said, "but what was it anyhow?"

"I think," I replied, "that it was an aeroplane. It came down, you know, and the gasoline caught fire, and . . ." I found a box of matches and struck a light, but the wind blew it out.

And then other people began to arrive.

The following day was memorable to us, as I have hinted, for it revealed to us the enterprise of a modern free and enlightened press. Bill said no husband of her's should ever take assignments to interview people if that was the way of it. But the day after that was memorable, to me especially. The hue and cry was gone, our little happenings were forgotten and some other home was besieged by the reporters. I had started out on the frozen snow to go to the post-office with some manuscript when I met Beppo and Ben with the sled, bound for a certain slope which they credited with famous tobogganing virtues. They greeted me as if I were one of them; seriously they turned their faces up to mine as they expounded their plans. I was aware of an inward fluttering of pride, for it is no small matter to win the confidence of small children. I went with them towards the hill they spoke of. It lay at the end of an avenue of superb trees whose black, leafless twigs bore their frosting of snow like strings of jewels in the glittering air. The wind blew up the avenue keenly in our faces as we trudged. And then, where the trees ended, the hill fell away at our feet, the valley lay far and wide, the steel-

blue river winding below, and in the distance the domes and towers of the Metropolis.

"Look!" I said, stooping down to them and pointing. "Do you know what that is?" They nodded and looked at me smiling. "N'York," they whispered.

"When is father coming home?" I asked.

"Soon," said Beppo. "Ma was cryin' this mornin'."

"Why," I said in astonishment. "And does she cry when he comes home?"

"Oh, no," he replied slowly. "She cheers up when he comes home. It's the storm, I guess. When the wind blows she cries a good bit."

And the next moment they were flying, face forward, down the hill.

I was roused from the study into which this plunged me by Miss Fraenkel's interest in the catastrophe. As I bought my stamps and posted my letters she continued to discuss its possibilities.

"What a story it would make!" she observed. "A thing like that coming down here, of all places, and nobody expecting it. Like Sherlock Holmes."

"Very," I said. "I must try my hand at it some day."

"And of course," she went on, "you'll have to fix up a love interest. You remember you told me it was absolutely necessary to have one."

"Yes, I'll try that too," I assured her. "And the post-mistress as well. All the best stories have one."

"Don't you dare," she called after me, laughing. My friend was busy at his easel, blocking out a poster for a breakfast-food.

"Where's Bill?" I asked. With a movement of his head as he reached for his matches, he indicated next door.

Presently she returned, rather pale and at first reluctant to say very much. It came out slowly as she arranged it in her mind.

"She has seen him," she said. "And he wrote to her. It put notions in her head. But she can't explain—in English, you know. She kept saying, 'My heart! Oh, my heart! . . . ' And yet she's glad in a way. It would have been splendid and awful if he had—don't you think? Just fancy! . . . He was one of those men—I did what I could to soothe her . . . He will be home to-morrow, too, if all is well . . . Poor thing!"

It is on the point of dusk as we stand at the studio-window and watch him coming up the hill, seeking vaguely for the foot path in the snow. He is wrapped up warmly, and his Derby hat is set firmly upon his down-bent head. The corn-cob pipe smokes on as ever, and he pauses to shake out the ash as he steps down upon the road. At this there is a sudden rush across the street of two small men in scarlet jerseys and caps. He stands and looks down at them, a quizzical smile on his face. Then he looks up and seeing us, makes a grave gesture of salutation. His glance sweeps over to his house, his own inviolate home, and

drops once again to his children tugging at his hands. And then, with a reflective air, he steps across to the sidewalk, and walks sedately up to his door.

THE END



THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

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15-103

